Unitarian Doctrines,
Sectarian murmurs, & Ill founded hopes—
in

THREE

(14)

DISCOURSES:

I. ON THE PROGRESS OF RELIGIOUS AND CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE.

BY WILLIAM ENFIELD, LL.D.

II. ON RELIGIOUS ZEAL; WITH A COMPARATIVE VIEW OF THE PROTESTANT DISSENTERS OF THE LAST AND PRESENT AGE.

BY RICHARD GODWIN.

III. ON THE CHARACTER, OFFICES, AND QUALIFICATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN PREACHER.

BY PHILIP HOLLAND.

His amor unus erat ----------
------- communi portam ſtatione tenebant.

VIRG.

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MDCCLXXX.

TO

SAMUEL SHORE, ESQUIRE,

OF

NORTON-HALL, DERBYSHIRE.

SIR,

THE authors of theſe Diſcourſes are happy in having your permiſſion to prefix your name to them. It is their wiſh to procure a more general attention, than is uſually given to the ſubjects, which they here lay before the public. They are ſubjects, which ought to com-

mand the regard of all who are capable of underſtanding them; but many circumſtances occur to check the pleaſing hope of ſuch a change in the preſent age, as the turning from vain pleaſures, and frivolous amuſements, to the moſt ſerious and manly ſtudies, ſuppoſes. The wiſe, conſiſtent friends of religion are, however, deſirous of availing themſelves of every circumſtance, which may procure them a more favourable hearing, when they are pleading a cauſe ſo eſſential to the beſt intereſts of mankind.

A FAIR repreſentation of the principles of religion, will doubtleſs

leſs have a very happy effect on the minds of thoſe who can be prevailed upon to view and conſider it; but to many it will perhaps be a ſtill more powerful recommendation of it, to hold up to their view ſuch characters as are diſtinguiſhed by the faithful diſcharge of all the offices of life, under the influence of thoſe religious principles, which a free, impartial inquiry has formed and eſtabliſhed.

It would be a particular pleaſure, Sir, to the authors of this publication, if they might be permitted to deduce from theſe general ideas a detail of the reaſons

which have led them to addreſs you on the preſent occaſion: but they are ſenſible they cannot do this without hurting one of the moſt amiable virtues, by which your character is adorned. That they may not offend, therefore, where it is their deſire to pleaſe, they content themſelves with adding their warmeſt wiſhes, that your life may long be preſerved to bleſs your neareſt connexions; and that the benevolent, uſeful ſchemes, which you at preſent encourage, may for many years to come, have the ſupport of your name and influence; and ſubſcribe themſelves, with high eſteem for your character, and with a grateful

grateful ſenſe of the indulgence which you have ſhewn to themſelves in particular,

SIR,

Your moſt obliged

and obedient

humble Servants,

THE AUTHORS.

PREFACE.

IT *might ſeem a ſufficient apology for the ſingularity of publiſhing the diſcourſes of different perſons in the ſame volume, to inform our readers, that thoſe which are here offered to the public attention were, in ſubſtance, lately delivered on occaſions, on which a conſiderable number of* Diſſenting *Miniſters were aſſembled; and that the authors are ſo nearly agreed in their general views, that they wiſh to appear in the world as* Friends, *united in the ſupport of an important* Common Cauſe.

BUT *beſides this, the authors think it not improper to ſuggeſt, that they apprehend a particular neceſſity, at the preſent time,*

time, for a firm alliance among the friends of rational inquiry and religious liberty; in order, on the one hand, to excite a proper attention to the great principles of religion and morals, among thoſe who have hitherto diſcovered inattention and indifference to theſe objects; and, on the other, to counteract the operation of that ſpirit of enthuſiaſm which has, of late years, made ſuch rapid advances both in the Church of England, and among the ſeveral ſects of Proteſtant Diſſenters.

With theſe views, they have, in the following diſcourſes, marked the gradual progreſs of religious and Chriſtian knowledge, noticed the obſtructions which have retarded this progreſs, and ſuggeſted the means by which it may be promoted: they have endeavoured to revive the dying ſpirit of religious zeal, to diſtinguiſh it from its counterfeit, bigotry, and to aſſiſt and regulate its exertions: and laſtly, they have taken the freedom to remind

their

their brethren *of the nature and obligations of their office; and to offer them such hints of advice as appeared most important and seasonable, and best adapted to render the Christian ministry productive of the intellectual and moral improvement of mankind.*

Relying on the goodness of the cause in which they are engaged, they trust they do not indulge a flattering idea, when they entertain the expectation, that their united efforts will produce some good effect.

They are not without hopes, that the same spirit of reformation, which has of late been so successfully excited, and promises such happy effects in the political world, will spread its influence to the affairs of religion, and in time produce such improvements in its public offices, as shall bear some proportion to the progress which has been made in science,

and

and in the uſeful as well as ornamental arts. At leaſt they expect that much will be done to encourage a liberal ſpirit of inquiry, and to promote true principles of religion, and rational forms of worſhip, by the united body of Proteſtant Diſſenters, who are by profeſſion friends to religious liberty, and advocates for the unreſtrained inveſtigation of truth, and the decent, but unreſerved declaration and ſupport of private opinion. They truſt, that they will not neglect to avail themſelves of the advantages which accrue to them from their entire exemption from all human authority in faith and practice, by embracing and forwarding every ſcheme of improvement, which the progreſs of religious knowledge in the preſent, or in any ſucceeding age may ſuggeſt. The time is, they hope, approaching, when the ſeveral ſects of Chriſtians will ſo far forget the diſtinctions which ſeparate them, as heartily to unite in ſupport of their common

common rights, and to desire no other bond of union than Christian Charity.

N. B. *The third discourse, having been considerably enlarged since it was delivered, is divided into sections, which are rather intended for the reader's convenience, than to point out the method which the author has pursued.*

DISCOURSE I.

ON THE PROGRESS OF RELIGIOUS AND CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE.

DISCOURSE I.

MATTHEW XIII. 33.

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE UNTO LEAVEN, WHICH A WOMAN TOOK AND HID IN THREE MEASURES OF MEAL TILL THE WHOLE WAS LEAVENED.

TO determine with certainty, in what particulars the acknowledged ſuperiority in the nature of man above that of the other animal inhabitants of the earth conſiſts, has always been eſteemed a matter of conſiderable

difficulty. It may perhaps caſt ſome light upon this ſubject, to remark, that it appears to be the peculiar privilege of human nature, that it is capable of continual improvement not only in the individual but in the ſpecies. Whatever foreſight, ſagacity, or contrivance, the inferior animals of any particular claſs may diſcover individually, they ſeem wholly incapable of riſing, as a ſpecies, to any higher degrees of excellence than they poſſeſſed at their firſt formation. The bee, the ant, or the beaver of the preſent race, appears to have no larger portion of knowledge or ſkill, and to be capable of no greater perfection or variety in its productions, than the ſame animal in the earlieſt ages of the world. Whereas human nature admits of ſuch eſſential improvement, from the continued labours of individuals through a ſucceſſion of generations, that there is not perhaps a greater difference between the moſt ſagacious and

and the moſt ſtupid animal exiſting on the face of the earth, than between the human ſavage who ſubſiſts on the plunder of the foreſt, and the ingenious artiſt, or the "deep-judging ſage," formed in the poliſhed ſtate of ſociety.

IT is a pleaſing employment to a contemplative mind, to obſerve the gradual progreſſion of ſcience, arts, and manners, through the ſeveral ſtages of civilization; and to remark the valuable acceſſions which have from time to time been made to the ſtock of human knowledge, to the convenience, ornament, and happineſs of ſociety, and even to the intrinſic value and dignity of human nature. And it is worthy of particular notice, that many of the moſt eſtimable of theſe acquiſitions have ariſen from the ſmalleſt beginnings, and have gradually advanced to degrees of conſequence, of which the firſt inventor or diſcoverer had no con-

ception. Little did the man who firſt obſerved the polarity of the loadſtone, or he who executed the firſt rude ſketch of the art of printing, imagine, to what valuable purpoſes their reſpective diſcoveries would afterwards be applied. And if it be conſidered, how clearly theſe continual improvements in ſciences and arts, ſo immediately productive of human happineſs, indicate the conſtant ſuperintendence of a wiſe and benevolent Director, this ſubject appears by no means unworthy of our attention at a ſeaſon devoted to the purpoſes of religion.

But it is my more immediate deſign in this diſcourſe, to direct your thoughts to the gradual advances of truth, religion and virtue in the world, or, in other words, of that kingdom of righteouſneſs, eſtabliſhed by the appointment and authority of Almighty God, under the immediate agency of Jeſus Chriſt,

Chriſt, ſo expreſſively deſcribed by himſelf in the words of the text; "The kingdom of heaven is like unto "leaven, which a woman took and "hid in three meaſures of meal till "the whole was leavened."

THE earlieſt records of mankind place human nature before us in a ſtate of imperfection and weakneſs nearly reſembling that of childhood. We ſee men every where, during the firſt ages of the world, admitting idle and abſurd opinions which the wiſdom of later times has diſcovered to be errors; and falling into practices, which experience and reflection have at length taught them to deſpiſe as childiſh follies. Theſe apparent defects it ſeems much more rational to impute to the original conſtitution of human nature, deſigned by its great Author to advance, from the ignorance and imbecility of infancy, to the wiſdom and ſtrength of

mature age, than to aſcribe them to any occaſional depravity, ſuperinduced by ſome external cauſe, contrary to the original intention of the Creator. And it is delightful to obſerve the ſeveral ſteps which the Almighty Parent of our nature has purſued in the education of his rational offspring.

To correct that propenſity to ſuperſtition and idolatry which is the natural effect of ignorance and fear, the knowledge of the one true God was early taught, and preſerved through a long ſeries of ages, by the Patriarchs and Prophets of the Jewiſh nation. To reſtrain thoſe licentious manners which are the weeds that ſpontaneouſly ſpring up in the ſoil of uncultivated nature, many wiſe men were raiſed up, in the more civilized nations of the world, to inculcate the genuine principles and maxims of virtue.

STILL, however, the progreſs of ſound knowledge and virtuous manners, was neither ſo ſpeedy, nor ſo extenſive as might have been wiſhed. The Jews had neither that political diſtinction among the nations, nor that ſuperior wiſdom and exemplary purity of manners, which were neceſſary to eſtabliſh their authority as teachers of religion to the reſt of the world. The philoſophers of Greece and Rome were more intent on deciding queſtions of ſpeculation among themſelves, than on inſtructing the vulgar in the plain duties of morality. And both were either ignorant of, or inattentive to, the important doctrine of future rewards and puniſhments, as the principal ſanction of the laws of virtue.

To complete the important deſign of conducting human nature to a ſtate of intellectual and moral perfection, it was therefore become neceſſary, that a

Divine Inſtructor ſhould appear, who ſhould give men a more perfect rule of life than any they had hitherto received; who ſhould condeſcend to addreſs the vulgar in language which they could underſtand; who ſhould enforce his doctrine by the authority of religion and the promiſe of immortality; and who ſhould be able to give ſatisfactory proofs of the validity of his pretenſions to the character of a teacher ſent from God.

Such a Divine Inſtructor was our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt. And the ſucceſs of his embaſſy was in ſome meaſure worthy of the importance of the meſſage, and the character of the meſſenger. At firſt indeed, only a ſmall number of diſciples accompanied him, and theſe taken from the loweſt orders of the people: "none of the rulers believed on him." Notwithſtanding the excellence of his doctrine, notwith-

notwithſtanding the divine authority with which he ſpoke, "he was deſpiſed and rejected of men." But neither prejudice, intereſt, nor power, can in the iſſue prevail againſt the truth. Even during our Saviour's perſonal miniſtry, the number of his followers was by no means inconſiderable. But after his reſurrection, his apoſtles made converts in every place. Wherever they preached the kingdom of God, "multitudes "were daily added unto them." "So "mightily grew the word of God, and "prevailed." "The kingdom of hea-"ven," or the doctrine of Chriſt, "was "like unto leaven, which a woman took "and hid in three meaſures of meal till "the whole was leavened."

If we trace the efficacy of this heavenly doctrine through the ſucceeding ages of the church, we meet with many diſcouraging appearances; and often ſee its ſalutary operation retarded by the malignant

malignant action of oppoſite powers. Even when the viſible church of Chriſt was become great and ſplendid, his doctrine had leſs influence, and his kingdom fewer ſubjects, than a ſuperficial obſerver would ſuppoſe. Many cauſes, at this period, concurred to obſtruct the progreſs of the pure religion of Chriſt. Forms and ceremonies were introduced into religion, which were by no means conſiſtent with the ſimplicity of Chriſtian worſhip: the plain doctrine of Chriſt was perplexed and obſcured by being cloathed in words "hard to be underſtood;" and Chriſtian zeal was waſted upon religious controverſies, into which a ſcholaſtic jargon was introduced, that ſerved no other end, than to diſtinguiſh the ſeveral ſects of Chriſtians, and perpetuate their mutual animoſities.

THE intellectual darkneſs which, at this period, overſpread the earth, as might

might naturally be expected, concealed for many ages the lovely form of religion. The ignorant multitude adopted all the myſtical dogmas which their prieſts iſſued from their cells, as deciſions from the oracles of truth. The articles of belief, delivered by ſynods and councils, obtained an authority equal to that of the Holy Scriptures: a ſhort ſpace of time gave theſe decrees the ſanction of antiquity; and thus, the chain of eccleſiaſtical power was firmly rivetted, and the errors and ſuperſtitions which had crept into the faith and worſhip of Chriſtians, ſanctified by prieſtcraft, and protected by the civil power, were likely for ever to remain.

BUT, the ſacred leaven, though long incapable of producing any viſible effect on the corrupted maſs in which it was concealed, ſtill retained its virtue. The doctrine of Chriſt, a vital active principle, like the vegetable life in plants, which

which lies dormant for a while, and then appears with freſh vigour, in the midſt of this dreary winter ſuddenly manifeſted its vivifying power, and preſented the firſt appearance of ſpring. A few able and zealous men, inſpired with the love of truth, dared to call in queſtion opinions till then univerſally received, and to aſſert the right of private judgment. And, though they neither diſcovered the whole extent of Chriſtian truth, nor fully underſtood the principles of Chriſtian liberty; by breaking through the fences of eccleſiaſtical authority, and venturing to form an opinion for themſelves on religious ſubjects, they opened the way to free inquiry, and began a career, which their poſterity have purſued, far beyond *their* moſt enlarged ideas.

Soon after the firſt dawn of the Reformation, ſeveral great men aroſe, who poſſeſſed ſuch ſtrength and acuteneſs

neſs of underſtanding, and freedom of ſpirit, as to be able, at one effort, to ſeparate the pure religion of Chriſt from the maſs of abſurdities and ſuperſtitions with which it had been mixed; and to conceive themſelves, and repreſent to others, a ſyſtem of faith ſo rational and ſcriptural, that all the labours of modern times have done little to improve it. Theſe bold innovators, however, placed themſelves on a ground ſo far removed from the old eſtabliſhment, and even from the commonly received ſyſtem of the reformed church, that they gained few followers, and only brought upon themſelves, and thoſe who had penetration and fortitude enough to become their adherents, the cenſures and anathemas of thoſe churches which claimed to themſelves the merit of orthodoxy.* By appearing at the head of a ſmall and deſpiſed ſect, they

* See Toulmin's *Life of Socinus*, and Lindſey's *Diſſertations*.

only

only furniſhed the multitude with appellations of obloquy and contempt for free inquirers in ſucceeding ages.

In later times, the progreſs of free inquiry, and of its natural offspring, rational ideas on religious ſubjects, has by no means been ſo rapid, as, conſidering the aſtoniſhing advances which have been made in every other kind of knowledge, might have been expected. Two cauſes have chiefly contributed to retard the good work of reformation: firſt, the appointment of ſubſcription to articles of faith, as the term of admiſſion into every national church; and ſecondly, the propenſity which has always prevailed among the vulgar, to prefer a religion, which either captivates the ſenſes and imagination, or agitates and inflames the paſſions, to one which is immediately addreſſed to the underſtanding and the moral principle, and has no other object than to make

make men wiſe and virtuous. The requiſition of uniformity in faith, by taking the truth of the received ſyſtem for granted, ſuperſedes every idea of improvement; reſtrains thoſe who ought to inquire that they may be qualified to teach, from the free inveſtigation and communication of truth; propagates among the laity an idea of the infallibility of the church; and encourages the vulgar in that bigotted attachment to old opinions, and that uncharitable ſpirit towards thoſe who call in queſtion the popular creed, to which, alas! they are of themſelves ſufficiently inclined. And a propenſity to myſticiſm and enthuſiaſm gives men a diſreliſh for all rational inquiry;—diſpoſes them to reſt ſatisfied with vague and confuſed ideas on religious ſubjects, and to admit the greateſt abſurdities in opinion without any ſhadow of rational evidence;—leads them to look upon every ſolid and judicious attempt to elucidate the princi-

ples

ples of morality and religion as dry and tedious reaſoning; and, in fine, prepares them to prefer *noiſe* to *ſenſe*, *paſſion* to *principle*, and *profeſſion* to *practice*.

It is ſufficiently obvious, that both theſe cauſes muſt operate powerfully to perpetuate ignorance and error, and to counteract the ſalutary influences of true religion in the world. Their actual effect on the religious character of our own country for ſeveral paſt ages, has been ſuch as cannot be impartially reviewed, without the fulleſt conviction, that every degree of eccleſiaſtical domination, and every ſpecies of enthuſiaſm, is unfriendly to the intereſts of truth and virtue.

Notwithstanding theſe obſtructions, however, the good ſeed, ſown by Chriſt and his apoſtles, has ſprung up plentifully, and by the faithful labours of many wiſe and good men, has been cleared

cleared from weeds, and cheriſhed in its growth, till at length we ſee the fair promiſe of a plentiful harveſt. It is true, theſe great and zealous champions for liberty and free inquiry have been branded with opprobrious names; and the ſmall band of followers which they have been able to collect, has been, like the whole ſociety of Chriſtians in the days of the apoſtles, "a little ſect, every where ſpoken againſt." But every indignity which they have ſuffered is amply repaid; every reproach which ignorance or bigotry has caſt upon them is abundantly recompenſed, by the beneficial fruits, which have already appeared, and are daily produced, in conſequence of their labours.

MYSTICISM and abſurdity are giving way to plain truth and common ſenſe. Men are beginning to prefer a few weighty doctrines, which every one may underſtand and believe, to all the ſub-

tilties of the ſchools. The equal, univerſal, and unalienable right of every man to form his religious ſyſtem, and chooſe his mode of religious worſhip for himſelf, is *generally* underſtood and acknowledged. The grounds of eccleſiaſtical authority have been examined, and found inſufficient to ſupport the mighty ſtructure which has been raiſed upon them: the pillars of prieſtcraft are ſhaken; the ſimple doctrines of religion, taught by Jeſus Chriſt, are regaining their authority; the pure gold is daily ſeparating itſelf from the baſe alloy which ignorance or artifice had mixed with it. Many of the outworks which the injudicious friends of Chriſtianity had raiſed to defend a cauſe which needed not ſuch feeble aid, are freely given up, the better to ſecure the main fortreſs. The forms of religion are beginning to be diſencumbered from thoſe childiſh ceremonies which have no connection with the genuine emotions

tions of rational piety, and at the ſame time to be reſcued from the diſgrace which the pretenſions of viſionaries and enthuſiaſts to immediate inſpiration, had brought upon them. The doctrine of Chriſt is now underſtood to be a ſyſtem of pure morality, enforced by the ſanction of future rewards and puniſhments, and ſupported by the authority of religion. Chriſtian worſhip is now regarded, not as a weekly peace-offering to heaven for the daily vices of a bad life, nor as artificial fewel, ſupplied at regular intervals, to keep alive the flames of enthuſiaſm; but as a natural expreſſion of gratitude and ſubjection from man to his Maker, and as a rational means of eſtabliſhing the principles and ſupporting the practice of virtue in the world.

I CONGRATULATE my Chriſtian brethren, and all who are capable of diſcerning the value of ſuch bleſſings, on theſe ſymptoms of the progreſs of "pure and

undefiled religion." I rejoice that ſuch rational views and liberal principles are not only to be found in a few individuals, but give the leading character and ſpirit to many reſpectable ſocieties of Chriſtians. Theſe happy advances in the good work of religious reformation, authoriſe us to apply to the preſent ſtate of religion the figurative language of the text: "The kingdom of heaven "is like unto leaven, which a woman "took and hid in three meaſures of "meal till the whole was leavened." Many favourable circumſtances concur to aſſure us, that from theſe ſmall beginnings great effects will ariſe. "A "little one ſhall become a thouſand, "and a ſmall one a ſtrong nation." "A little leaven, leaveneth the whole "lump."

We ſee a thirſt for knowledge of every kind prevailing amongſt us: why ſhould we ſuppoſe, that religion will be

be the only ſubject concerning which men will chooſe to remain in ignorance? We ſee freedom of inquiry in every branch of ſcience univerſally encouraged, and a tame ſubmiſſion to authority every where treated with ridicule and contempt. Why ſhould we doubt, that the ſame ſpirit will ere long burſt aſunder the bands of prieſtly dominion, and lead every man to aſſert and maintain his right of thinking and acting for himſelf in religion?

In the intercourſes of friendly converſation, we find a much more general diſpoſition to enter upon the free diſcuſſion of important topics, in ſcience, arts, policy and religion, than formerly. Men are now leſs apt to take alarm at the ſtarting of a new doctrine, or to be offended and ſhocked on hearing their own opinions controverted. Many writers, who at the time when their works appeared, were condemned as

heretics of the firſt order, are now read with patience, and even with reſpect; and thoſe who lead the way, at preſent, in freedom of inquiry, are heard with more attention, and treated with more candour, than fell to the ſhare of their leſs heterodox anceſtors. May we not from hence fairly infer an increaſing diſpoſition towards free inquiry, and conſequently a growing tendency towards the propagation of truth, in the character of the preſent age?

THE general ſpirit of the times we cannot but obſerve to be exceedingly favourable to religious liberty. It is an undoubted fact, that within the ſpace of a ſingle century, a rapid progreſs has been made in candour and liberality of ſentiment. At the beginning of that period, not the ſmalleſt trace of a ſpirit of toleration appeared in the civil conſtitution of this country: and even ſince the act of toleration, though

though obtained at a period moſt favourable to liberty, diſſenters from the eſtabliſhed church have, in general, been left expoſed to legal ſeverities. The ſpirit of intolerance has, however, gradually loſt ground: the penal laws reſpecting religion have long lain dormant; and at length, through the ſteady perſeverance of the friends of liberty, the boundaries of religious toleration have been conſiderably extended by the almoſt unanimous voice of our legiſlature; while the advocates for eccleſiaſtical tyranny, once ſo formidable a body, have been obliged to retire into their antient ſtrong-holds, and have only been able from thence to repeat, with a faint and trembling voice, the cry which once filled the nation with uproar, "The church is in danger."

THESE are deciſive indications of the prevalence of a candid and liberal ſpirit,

heretics of the firſt order, are now read with patience, and even with reſpect; and thoſe who lead the way, at preſent, in freedom of inquiry, are heard with more attention, and treated with more candour, than fell to the ſhare of their leſs heterodox anceſtors. May we not from hence fairly infer an increaſing diſpoſition towards free inquiry, and conſequently a growing tendency towards the propagation of truth, in the character of the preſent age?

The general ſpirit of the times we cannot but obſerve to be exceedingly favourable to religious liberty. It is an undoubted fact, that within the ſpace of a ſingle century, a rapid progreſs has been made in candour and liberality of ſentiment. At the beginning of that period, not the ſmalleſt trace of a ſpirit of toleration appeared in the civil conſtitution of this country: and even ſince the act of toleration, though

though obtained at a period moſt favourable to liberty, diſſenters from the eſtabliſhed church have, in general, been left expoſed to legal ſeverities. The ſpirit of intolerance has, however, gradually loſt ground: the penal laws reſpecting religion have long lain dormant; and at length, through the ſteady perſeverance of the friends of liberty, the boundaries of religious toleration have been conſiderably extended by the almoſt unanimous voice of our legiſlature; while the advocates for eccleſiaſtical tyranny, once ſo formidable a body, have been obliged to retire into their antient ſtrong-holds, and have only been able from thence to repeat, with a faint and trembling voice, the cry which once filled the nation with uproar, "The church is in danger."

THESE are deciſive indications of the prevalence of a candid and liberal ſpirit,

and happy omens of the farther ſpread of that kingdom of truth and righteouſneſs, which is the kingdom of heaven. I am not inſenſible, however, that there are circumſtances which have a contrary aſpect: I perceive difficulties; I am aware of diſcouragements.

ECCLESIASTICAL authority, while it is employed to preſerve an uniformity of faith, will obtain blind veneration and tame ſubmiſſion from weak and vulgar minds, and check the natural exertions of the underſtanding in the ſearch of truth; and ſelfiſh timidity, under the ſpecious diſguiſe of prudence and caution, will repreſent every innovation as dangerous, and ſtart innumerable objections to every ſcheme of reformation which can be propoſed.—Still, however, we may aſſure ourſelves that the good work of reformation will be carried forwards. The people, accuſtomed to ſpeculate on other topics,

topics, will, it may be expected, think and judge for themſelves concerning religion: doubtful queſtions will be fully canvaſſed; the defects of the preſent religious eſtabliſhment will be obſerved and cenſured; many will wiſh for an alteration; ſome judicious friends of religion will ſuggeſt improvements: not a few even of the guardians of the church, eſpecially among the younger clergy, will ſee the propriety of a reformation, and be diſpoſed to promote it: while others who have leſs liberality, or leſs zeal, will perceive the expediency and even neceſſity of doing ſomething to gratify the public taſte; and thus from motives of prudence will become reformers. In this manner it is probable, that the public forms of religion will be gradually improved; till at laſt, a religious eſtabliſhment will ariſe, in which the ſimple doctrines of Chriſtianity will be taught without myſtery; in which plain and general forms of devotion

devotion will be inſtituted; and in which the moſt ample proviſion will be made for the unlimited toleration of different opinions in religion, and modes of worſhip.

Great obſtructions to the progreſs of "pure religion" muſt alſo ariſe from that numerous body of modern enthuſiaſts, who through the blind zeal or the intereſted artifice of their chief leaders, have been trained up for the defence of abſurd opinions, the ſupport of a myſtical and fanciful ſpirit in religion, and the propagation of bigotry and uncharitableneſs. With all the bold pretenſions which the founders and ſupporters of this ſyſtem make to extraordinary and ſupernatural communications from heaven; with all the appearances of ſuperior purity and ſanctity of manners which they aſſume; with all the arts which they uſe for amuſing the imaginations and working upon

upon the paſſions of the vulgar, while they excuſe them from the irkſome labours of thinking, and permit, nay encourage them to lay aſide the troubleſome operations of reaſon; it is no wonder that they gain proſelytes in every place, and that the multitude crowd around them wherever they go. It muſt be expected that thoſe who have never accuſtomed themſelves to reflection, or choſen their religion from conviction and principle, ſhould be "driven about by every wind of doctrine."—Nevertheleſs, "great is truth, and will at laſt prevail." When the rage of novelty is over, and the heat of paſſion is abated, we will not doubt that many, who now deſpiſe the name of reaſon, will liſten to her "ſtill ſmall voice;" that their preſent blind attachment to their leaders will give way to the deſire of knowledge and love of truth; that their zeal will be directed by judgment, and tempered with moderation

deration; and that they will ſettle into the reſpectable character of *rational Chriſtians*.

THERE is yet another enemy to the ſpread of true religion in the world, more formidable than any hitherto mentioned, namely, the ſpirit of inattention and indifference with reſpect to the principles and practice of religion, now ſo generally prevalent in the world. Men are either too fond of pleaſure to have inclination, or too eager in the purſuit of wealth and greatneſs to have leiſure, for reflection. An inſatiable thirſt for amuſement, a weak and frivolous ambition of ſhining in the external decorations of life, an impatient deſire of acquiring the conſequence attendant on independence, are with multitudes the only principles concerned in directing their actions, or forming their characters. To theſe, every great idea, every manly ſentiment, every generous purpoſe is ſacrificed.

ſacrificed. With theſe triflers—and they are a numerous tribe—the order of nature is inverted; the ornaments of dreſs are preferred to the inward furniture of the mind; the perpetual diſſipation of diverſions, to the rational pleaſures of reading and converſation; the gratification of being admired, to the ſatisfaction of being eſteemed and beloved; and the ſhewy accompliſhments of politeneſs, to the ſubſtantial merit of genuine goodneſs: in ſhort, every thing inſignificant is made of importance, and every thing important eſteemed of little value. It muſt be owned, that minds thus perverted in their judgment, and depraved in their taſte, afford not the moſt favourable ſoil for the growth of wiſdom and virtue. Yet we will hope, that even theſe triflers will at length catch the infection of that love of knowledge which is daily gaining ground, and from the power of faſhion, if from no better motive, will learn to think. We will hope, that good ſenſe will in time

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put folly out of countenance; that, as the world becomes more enlightened, men will ſee, that there are higher ſources of enjoyment than the pleaſures of ſenſe or the amuſements of fancy, and better grounds of diſtinction, than thoſe of wealth and rank; and will be convinced, that an improved underſtanding, a cultivated taſte, a friendly heart, an inflexible integrity, peaceful reflections, and fair proſpects, are things of ſome value to rational beings; that intellectual and moral excellence conſtitutes the chief merit of individuals; that the increaſe of uſeful knowledge and virtuous manners is the ſureſt omen of the proſperity of a ſtate; and conſequently, that it ought to be the firſt object of attention with every man, to cultivate his mind, and improve his character.

To counteract the operation of every cauſe which obſtructs the progreſs of truth and virtue, and to eſtabliſh rational

tional opinions, virtuous principles, and good manners in the world, is the great duty, and will, doubtleſs, be the delightful employment of all the friends of religion and Chriſtianity.

TOWARDS executing this laudable deſign, much is to be done by the combined and vigorous exertions of thoſe, whoſe profeſſion conſtitutes them public guardians of the intereſts of truth and virtue. But without vigorous exertions no effect can be produced. In accompliſhing ſchemes of reformation, diſcretion ſhould be employed to regulate, not to reſtrain, the operations of courage. It was by the bold and perſevering efforts of the firſt Chriſtians, that our holy religion forced its way through all the oppoſition of prejudice and worldly intereſt. It was by the ſame ſpirit, that this religion was, in ſome meaſure, reſcued out of the hands of ignorance and prieſtcraft at the Reformation. And

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it is only by the ſame ſpirit, ſteadily as well as prudently exerted, that the great deſign of ſtill farther reforming the Chriſtian world in faith, worſhip and practice, can ever be carried into execution. From the ſlothful, the timid, and the ſelfiſh nothing is to be expected.

THOSE who are too fond of luxurious indolence, to endure the labours of attentive thinking themſelves, cannot be ſuppoſed to be much in earneſt in promoting a ſpirit of inquiry in others. Men of pleaſure and diſſipation, with whom the chief object is, to amuſe themſelves agreeably and faſhionably, will not be the more likely to attempt improvements in religion becauſe they are under the neceſſity—to many, a painful neceſſity—of wearing its livery, and performing its public offices: they will be more inclined to ridicule the idea of reformation, than ſeriouſly to engage in the undertaking.

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WHERE the leading trait of a man's character is caution and timidity, the deſign of reforming the world will appear to him ſurrounded with inſuperable difficulties. Though he may applaud the deſign; though he may admire the fortitude of thoſe who attempt to accompliſh it; for his own part, he will chooſe to be excuſed from the hazardous enterprize:—"There is a lion "in the way; there is a lion in the "ſtreet."

NOR are we to hope that this great deſign will receive any conſiderable ſupport, from thoſe who ſuffer themſelves to be led away by the deluſive idea of popularity. When a man hath once indulged "the pitiful ambition" of ſhining in the eyes of the vulgar, and gaining the ſlender tribute of their applauſe, he will eaſily perſuade himſelf that the cauſe of religion is beſt promoted by yielding to prejudice, and

foſtering error; and will chooſe rather to raiſe the admiration and win the affections of his hearers, by addreſſes, which, though expreſſed in vague and indeterminate language, fall in with their preconceived ideas, and are adapted to excite enthuſiaſtic emotions, than, in the ſimple majeſty of truth and reaſon, to addreſs their underſtandings, in order to eſtabliſh their virtuous principles, and improve their moral characters.

Much leſs muſt we expect to ſee the work of reformation carried forwards, by thoſe who make the acquiſition of wealth and power their principal object. With ſuch men, not the poſſeſſion alone, but even the expectation of "a gift, will blind their eyes," or at leaſt ſilence their tongues. It is only in the beaten track of quiet ſubmiſſion to eſtabliſhed opinions, cuſtoms and prejudices, that preferment is to be found. To this beaten track, therefore,

fore, they will religiouſly adhere; and will diſcourage all attempts towards reformation as dangerous innovations; adopting the prudent language of the town-clerk of Epheſus, "Seeing theſe "things cannot be ſpoken againſt, we "ought to be quiet, and to do nothing "raſhly."

IT is only from thoſe who have eſtabliſhed their principles on the firm baſis of free inquiry—who are duly ſenſible of the importance of knowledge, particularly moral and religious, to the happineſs of mankind—and who, at the ſame time, poſſeſs inflexible integrity, a bold and enterprizing temper, and an invincible independence of ſpirit, from whom great attempts in the work of reformation are to be expected. Such men, inſtead of timidly keeping out of the way of danger by inſiſting wholly on general truths, or on a nearer approach to the ground of controverſy

making a cowardly retreat behind a ſet of phraſes of doubtful meaning, will avow and ſupport, with all plainneſs and frankneſs, whatever they judge to be important and ſeaſonable truths. They will not think it ſufficient, that they barely teach no error, but will eſteem it their duty to aſſiſt their hearers in ſearching after truth, and eſtabliſhing rational principles of religion and morals. Having dared to conceive the great idea of reformation, they will dare to attempt the execution. Fortified in the conſciouſneſs of their upright and benevolent intentions, they are prepared to receive with equal indifference, the cautious advice of the timid, the ridicule of the licentious, the ſcorn of the vulgar, the indignation of bigots, and the perſecution of tyrants. If they ſhould have the misfortune to be anathematiſed as heretics, for the very virtues for which many an orthodox martyr has been canonized, they will conſole themſelves

themſelves with the reflection, that the cenſures of men cannot deſtroy the merit of their character, and with the hope, that the good ſeed, which they have ſown with ſo much labour and hazard, will not periſh in the ground.

WHILE the miniſters of religion thus ſtrenuouſly exert themſelves for the propagation of truth and religion in the world, let wiſe and good men of every claſs unite to afford them their hearty countenance, and ſteady ſupport. Shaking off that lethargic ſpirit of indifference to the progreſs of knowledge, virtue and happineſs, which is the natural offspring of an uncultivated underſtanding and a ſelfiſh temper; alike diſdaining, tamely to ſubmit their judgment to the authority of eccleſiaſtic guides, or blindly to follow the track marked out by their anceſtors; and boldly daring, under the direction of reaſon, to advance, even by untrodden

paths, into the region of new opinions, and to draw aſide the veil of myſtical ſanctity which prejudice has ſpread over long eſtabliſhed errors; let them purſue their reſearches after truth with an ardent, liberal, and courageous ſpirit. On doubtful queſtions let them ſuſpend their judgment, till they have paſſed by the ſlow gradations of patient thinking, from uncertainty to rational conviction. And let them ſubmit without heſitation to the authority of reaſon, wherever her deciſions can be clearly aſcertained, even though they ſhould be obliged to ſurrender ſome of their favourite opinions, and to ſuffer the odium of opprobrious appellations. Let not any timid apprehenſion of the danger of innovation—let not a ſpirit of indifference under the ſpecious diſguiſe of moderation—induce them to practiſe themſelves, or to expect from their miniſters, a quiet acquieſcence in prevailing prejudices and errors which they

they judge to be injurious to the intereſts of virtue and religion. In full confidence that truth and happineſs can never be at variance, let them be always ready to allow, as well as to take, an unlimited latitude in argument, and give every poſſible encouragement to free inquiry.

MORE eſpecially, let thoſe who profeſs to ſeparate from the eſtabliſhed church for the ſake of enjoying their right of private judgment, and whoſe ſeparation frees them from all the reſtraints of eccleſiaſtical authority, be careful to act conſiſtently with their avowed principles, and to make a judicious improvement of their peculiar advantages. Inſtead of ſubjecting themſelves and their miniſters to voluntary incumbrances, from a weak, and in them an inconſiſtent and abſurd regard to human authority, or from a ſuperſtitious attachment to antient opinions and antient forms; let them watchfully

guard againſt every infringement, among themſelves, of thoſe rights of toleration, which are ſecured to them by the civil power. While they profeſs to value their religious liberty as their common treaſure, and to make it their common bond of union, let them have the courage to uſe this liberty for themſelves, and the candour to grant it, in its full extent, to others.

FINALLY, let both miniſters and people heartily unite their endeavours to reſtore the original purity and ſimplicity of Chriſtian doctrine, and to reſcue Chriſtian worſhip from every incumbrance or diſgrace which prieſtcraft or fanaticiſm has brought upon it; always remembering, that it is more conſiſtent with the true ſpirit of Chriſtianity, the great Author of which was, in the moſt reſpectable ſenſe of the appellation a Reformer, to be ever ready to encourage and promote improvements in religious opinions and practices, than

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to be rigidly tenacious of antient tenets and forms, merely becauſe they are ſuch; and that (in the words of a good writer*) "It is an honeſt, impartial, and un-" prejudiced freedom of thinking and " diſcourſing upon all ſubjects whatever, " conducted with humility, decency, " and information, which ought to diſ-" tinguiſh the religion of a Chriſtian " from that of all the world beſides."

In this manner, it may be hoped that the friends of truth, virtue, and religion will unite to carry forwards the good work of reformation. Nor ſhall it be doubted, that their united efforts will produce the moſt glorious and happy effects. Yes, I will foretell (and may it pleaſe the great Lord of nature to fulfil the prediction) that the cloud which was once "no bigger than a man's

* See Squire's *Indifference for Religion Inexcuſable*, Sect. II.

late Biſhop of St Davids, hand,"

hand," ſhall at length ſpread over the whole heavens, and water every region of the earth with the dews of heavenly wiſdom; that truth ſhall at laſt triumph over error, charity over perſecution, and religion and virtue over prophaneneſs and immorality; that all the nations of the world, ſubjected to the laws of truth and righteouſneſs, ſhall become the ſpiritual kingdom of God; and that the whole earth ſhall be one holy temple conſecrated unto the Lord. Amen.

DISCOURSE II.

ON

RELIGIOUS ZEAL;

WITH A COMPARATIVE VIEW OF THE

PROTESTANT DISSENTERS

OF THE

LAST AND THE PRESENT AGE.

DISCOURSE II.

GALATIANS IV. 18.

IT IS GOOD TO BE ZEALOUSLY AFFECTED ALWAYS IN A GOOD THING.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR's image, which was compoſed of baſe and precious materials, is a juſt emblem of the human ſpecies in every age. We may generally find both valuable and worthleſs qualities in the ſame character; it being much more common, and, as it ſhould ſeem, more eaſy, for men to unite in themſelves great inconſiſtencies, than to maintain through life a wiſe, virtuous, and religious conduct.

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THIS remark is abundantly verified in the general hiſtory of mankind: but, without entering upon ſo large a field, a few obvious and impartial obſervations upon our own countrymen would furniſh a ſufficient proof. My view, however, in the introduction to this diſcourſe, is ſtill more contracted, being to conſider the character of the Proteſtant Diſſenters in a moral and religious view for about a century paſt; from which, I am perſuaded, it will appear ſtrongly marked with qualities of a different and contrary nature.

IN the firſt place, no ſmall reſpect is due to thoſe bold and hardy adventurers in the laſt age, who made a public, ſteady oppoſition to the uſe, and much more to the impoſition of inſignificant ceremonies in religion: and a high commendation ought certainly to be paid them, for diſcovering an uniform, ardent zeal in the practice and ſupport of

of what appeared to them to be right, and for ſtanding forth as champions—at the riſk of every thing dear to them in this world—to explain, defend, and tranſmit to poſterity, the right and exerciſe of private judgment, the liberty of worſhipping God according to the dictates of conſcience, and other eſſential intereſts of Chriſtianity and human nature.

We muſt behold with admiration—with reverence, their invincible courage and firmneſs in profeſſing, vindicating, and, every other way in their power, promoting what they apprehended to be important truth and of the eſſence of religion: their integrity, induſtry, patience, and ſelf-denial are likewiſe highly deſerving of our notice and approbation; and, above all, their inſeparable union, which was formed and cemented by a ſtrong mutual affection, a ſteady adherence to their own plan of public

public worſhip, and a conſtant vigorous endeavour to advance what they believed to be the great cauſe of God and man.

I HAVE only to add (in order to finiſh the bright ſide of this manly character) the fervent piety of theſe zealous, reſolute men, which gave a deep tincture to their thoughts, temper, words, and actions, and particularly expreſſed itſelf in their attendance, with the utmoſt regularity and ſerioufneſs, upon all the inſtrumental duties of religion. Theſe difficult and important virtues ſeem to have been amongſt the principal ornaments of their character, and may, with propriety, be held forth as examples to the preſent age.

BUT there are, on the contrary, certain great and obvious imperfections, which truth and juſtice require to be mentioned as ſhades in this picture.

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THE diligent and impartial inquirer, however candid, muſt acknowledge that the Proteſtant Diſſenters, in leſs time than even half a century paſt, were, in general, auſtere in their temper and manners; that they painted religion with a gloomy aſpect; betrayed a ſpirit of ſingularity and oppoſition in trifles; were exceſſive and almoſt indiſcriminate in their invectives againſt pleaſure; laid too much ſtreſs upon modes and opinions; made too little allowance for human infirmities; fixed too high a value upon long and frequent retirements for the ſake of devotional exerciſes in private; placed as much too low the ſtandard of the moral virtues, thoſe eſpecially which are humane, generous, and, of all others, the moſt engaging; confined almoſt all their approbation and good will to the people of their own ſect; diſcovered an overweening conceit of their own ſpiritual attainments; and—what is ſtill worſe

than all the reſt—that there were undoubtedly inſtances of thoſe who put on the ſemblance of a rigorous piety to atone for, conceal, and give ſucceſs to heinous immorality.

It is with all readineſs acknowledged, that there are, upon record, many exceptions to this heavy charge; but the above-mentioned may, I think, be exhibited as ſome of the principal outlines in the character of thoſe who were, or affected to be, amongſt the beſt and moſt religious perſons in the laſt age. Nay further, if a diligent and impartial inquiry were now made into the prevailing temper of large bodies of Proteſtant Diſſenters in ſeveral different parts of this kingdom, it would be found that ſomething of the ſame ſpirit is ſtill remaining amongſt us.

Having endeavoured to ſketch out the portrait of the Proteſtant Diſſenters of

of the laſt age, I am now to contraſt it with certain prevalent and generally oppoſite qualities, which diſtinguiſh their ſucceſſors in the preſent age. But, previouſly to this, be it obſerved once for all, that I ſhall chiefly have thoſe in view who profeſs an enlarged and generous ſyſtem of religion.

AND truth and juſtice, it is preſumed, cannot refuſe their approving teſtimony to the following eulogium; that at leaſt a proportionable number of the Proteſtant Diſſenters have been amongſt thoſe who have made the greateſt improvements in every branch of the moſt uſeful knowledge; that many of them have long embraced and avowed a liberal ſyſtem of morality and religion; have ranked with the moſt public, ſteady, and conſiſtent advocates for freedom of inquiry and civil and religious liberty; and conſtantly united with the moſt forward to aſſert the ſufficiency of Scrip-

ture as a rule of faith and practice in religion, to exercise moderation towards all those who differ from them in matters of speculation and forms of worship, and to express esteem for good men of all religious professions, and a disinterested benevolence towards the whole human species. To all which may be added, that they have at least as much the appearance of religion as any of those who, like themselves, are professedly on the side of reason and liberty; and that the little religion which they suffer to appear amongst men hath this favourable circumstance, that it is likely to be sincere, being against the prevailing custom of the present age.

But, on the contrary, the modern Dissenters are many of them far advanced in the popular vices and follies of this age; unsettled in their religious principles and profession; devoted to pleasure,

ſure, and, eſpecially in the more poliſhed parts of the kingdom, habituated to a mode of living which is much too expenſive for a moderate income. This hath tempted multitudes of them, as well as others of their countrymen, to launch out into extenſive and hazardous ſchemes of trade and merchandiſe, to run unjuſtifiable riſks with the property of others, and, when their preſumptuous expectations have been fruſtrated, to ſeek for the means of their uſual exceſſes in all the different ſpecies of fraud and oppreſſion. What hath been—what muſt be the conſequence? Diſſipated fortunes, impoveriſhed families, ruined characters, broken conſtitutions, untimely deaths, and aggravated miſery in every form. Theſe are your chief trophies, O pride and intemperance! Theſe the neceſſary effects of thoſe epidemical vices which have long infected, and are daily more and more infecting all ranks and denominations of men.

THUS I have attempted to draw two motley pictures, by comparing the Proteſtant Diſſenters of the laſt age with thoſe of the preſent.

IT is not pretended that any arguments can juſtify—but it is eaſy to mention certain peculiar circumſtances which may, perhaps, in a great meaſure, account for, this oppoſition of character. It may principally be owing to the different extenſion of trade and civilization in this country at the two periods; to the different improvements made in the arts and ſciences, and in all the moſt refined kinds of knowledge; to the different opinions in religion; to the different ſtate of civil and religious liberty; and to the different temper of government and ſpirit of the times.

THE conſequence hath been, that the virtues of our predeceſſors were, like themſelves, of a ſevere and gloomy com-

complexion, more founded in principle and leſs in temper; whereas, ours originate chiefly in conſtitution and choice, being the free, eaſy, and inſinuating graces of manner and converſation. They ſeemed to hold the moral duties in too low an eſtimation, but, from one motive or another, in general regularly performed them: we applaud the whole ſyſtem in the higheſt terms, but are many of us partial and unſteady in practice. They, I am afraid, from the motives of intereſt, popularity and faſhion, often appeared to be more religious than they were: we, eſpecially in the youthful ſeaſon and the gay circles of life, from the ſame motives, ſeem to be leſs religious than, I hope, we really are. If they carried their affectation higher in one thing than in all the reſt, it was religion; that, by their looks, geſtures, and their whole ſtrain of converſation and behaviour, they might appear to be more pious

THUS I have attempted to draw two motley pictures, by comparing the Proteſtant Diſſenters of the laſt age with thoſe of the preſent.

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than they were: we, on the contrary, are many of us ſo ſolicitous to hide, as even ſometimes to deny the little religion which we have; and if ever we make more pretence than common to that which is really excellent, it is to benevolence, ſenſibility and charity.

WOULD to God an expedient could be found to unite rational piety with all the virtues! If the vices of each period were diſcarded, and the virtues of each adopted, what a bleſſed and glorious character would be exhibited to public view! And if we could be perſuaded to make the worthy attempt, what a happy improvement would it be of this compariſon!

To conclude this part of the ſubject; it is natural to remark upon what hath been ſaid, that a warm and ſteady zeal for religion, and for the practice of the more difficult ſelf-denying virtues, was the

the chief excellence in the leaders of our ſect in the laſt century; and that a manifeſt indifference to theſe ſacred and important concerns, is that far-ſpreading, and, I am afraid, increaſing evil, which particularly ſtigmatizes the Diſſenters in the preſent age. Upon this account, the foregoing compariſon will not be thought an improper introduction to that which is the principal deſign of this diſcourſe, namely, to explain and recommend true Zeal, as it reſpects the progreſs and improvement of religion and morality.

I SHALL begin with obſerving, that we ſhould carefully diſtinguiſh, leſt we confound the moral virtue with the natural paſſion. Zeal, in its original ſtate, like all the other paſſions, is, in a moral ſenſe, perfectly indifferent, being nothing more than an eager concern for or againſt ſome particular thing. It is indeed ſtrong by nature, and there-

fore

fore its exertions, which muſt always be of the impetuous kind, will neceſſarily produce great effects.

It ought to be conſtantly under the reſtraint and guidance of the wiſeſt and beſt of mankind; but hitherto, as far as religion and morality have been concerned, it hath chiefly been exerciſed by perſons of the weakeſt underſtandings and the moſt corrupt paſſions. Could any thing elſe be expected, particularly from an ignorant and bigotted zeal for what hath been miſcalled the Chriſtian religion, than—as hath actually happened—that, like a naked ſword in a madman's hand, it would ſpread terror and devaſtation on every ſide, and deluge a great part of the earth with the blood of many of the beſt Chriſtians?

But it is poſſible that zeal may be rendered harmleſs, uſeful, and even exalted

exalted into one of the moſt eminent virtues in the Chriſtian ſyſtem. In order to this it muſt be fixed upon its proper objects, have in view the beſt end, and be always preſerved within due bounds.

Now certain objects may be recommended which are ſo ſupremely excellent that they themſelves conſtitute the beſt poſſible end, or, at leaſt, are inſeparably connected with it; and therefore they cannot be proſecuted in an exceſſive degree, all faultineſs here being on the defective ſide.—What are thoſe objects which are of ſuch unqueſtionable, matchleſs excellence that they may, in every inſtance, be ſafely truſted with their own conſequences? You muſt have prevented me already in your thoughts, and concluded that theſe are, and can only be truth, morality and religion.

But what is truth? In general, it is the agreement of our ideas with the nature of things. All truths, however, though they be real and unchangeable, are not equally important. Some are ſo light and trivial as to have no conſequences worthy of our attention; and others are ſo abſtruſe as to require the utmoſt exertion of the human underſtanding, and often to eſcape the unwearied reſearches of the wiſeſt amongſt men. But, amidſt our preſent darkneſs and imperfection, it will afford us no ſmall ſatisfaction to reflect, that thoſe truths which are moſt neceſſary to the happineſs of man are the plaineſt, the difficulty of the inveſtigation, particularly in morals and religion, being always in the *inverſe ratio* of its importance. Airy, unprofitable ſpeculations, which float in the head, but deſcend not into the heart, nor influence the conduct, are not thoſe primary univerſal articles of faith, with which the moſt

moſt eſſential intereſts of mankind are neceſſarily connected.

THE great lines of truth, which are moſt important to all, and obvious to every one, are juſt opinions concerning the being, attributes and government of God, particularly his moral character, the neceſſary everlaſting diſtinctions of things, the nature and conſequences of virtue and vice, and a future juſt recompence according to men's conduct. Theſe, and ſuch as theſe, reſpecting the perfections and providence of God, and the conſtitution, duty and happineſs of man, are indeed fundamentals. Would to God no other had ever been called ſuch amongſt men! What myriads of lives would have been ſpared, and what order, peace and happineſs would probably have ſubſiſted between Chriſtians from the commencement of their religion to this time!

A DEEP

A DEEP regular and impartial attention to theſe indiſputable, moſt important truths, in order to fix our minds in the full conviction of them, is the moſt proper exerciſe, and tends to the higheſt improvement of the human underſtanding. To ſubmit ourſelves with entire confidence and without the leaſt reſerve, to their influence, conſtitutes man's beſt, happieſt ſtate in this world; and the public ſteady ſupport of them may, with great propriety, be recommended as one of the moſt worthy objects of our zealous concern through life.

To all this may be added, that the chief importance of theſe truths is, that they ſupply us with the ſtrongeſt motives to the practice of morality.

WHAT morality is, I might ſafely leave to every man's own heart to inform him. It is ſomething concerning which there can be no diſpute amongſt

amongſt unprejudiced and thoughtful men, whether it be really good or not: and, as it is unqueſtionably, ſo it is primarily and eſſentially good. It is the aſſemblage of almoſt all the moſt excellent, amiable and important qualities; it comprehends juſtice, compaſſion, charity, mercy, temperance, humility, and all the great virtues of life and converſation; it conſiſts in the right government of the heart, in the purity of the ſoul, and the harmony of all its powers; and expreſſes itſelf in propriety of conduct, and the regular conſcientious diſcharge of all ſocial, relative and perſonal duties. This is morality, which adapts itſelf to all the circumſtances of human life, and chiefly conſtitutes worth of character.

It requires of us, however, much more, than to rank amongſt its votaries, to harangue in its cauſe, or to practiſe its eaſy and pleaſant duties, whilſt we habitually

habitually indulge ourſelves in tranſgreſſing thoſe, which appear leaſt favourable to our private intereſt, our temper, our pleaſures, and the chief views of our lives. We are ſincerely and conſtantly to practiſe all the virtues, without any known, much leſs habitual deviations from the laws of righteouſneſs.

FURTHER, as morality always moſt certainly deſerves, ſo, at preſent, it ſtands in great need of the moſt public zealous countenance of its true friends; not only becauſe ſo few of thoſe who make the greateſt profeſſions of reſpect for it, imbibe its ſpirit and live up to its rules; but chiefly becauſe ſo many are endeavouring, with all their might, to erect what they call religion upon the ruins of morality, making an unnatural divorce between piety and virtue.

I WILL, in all candour and charity, ſuppoſe that many have been ſeduced into

into this erroneous and dangerous conduct by ignorance, a habit of inattention to theſe ſubjects, and a prejudiced attachment to an illiberal ſyſtem of religion. But candour and charity themſelves muſt not hinder me from ſuſpecting, that the inveterate, irreconcileable enmity of ſome perſons againſt the moral virtues ought to be aſcribed to a worſe cauſe; that it is in part owing to pride; they being determined at all events, to adhere to that ſyſtem which their anceſtors and themſelves have long publicly eſpouſed; but chiefly I am afraid, it is owing to this mortifying circumſtance, that the moral virtues are utterly inconſiſtent with the habitual gratification of every guilty paſſion. The zealous adherence to a ſet of notions, the ſcrupulous performance of a number of ceremonies, will connect well enough with covetouſneſs, injuſtice, cenſoriouſneſs, uncharitableneſs, intemperance, and the whole train of

the moſt odious and deſtructive vices. But there are not two greater oppoſites in nature, than morality and every kind of wickedneſs. However, becauſe the moral virtues ſo much oppoſe and ſhame the chief views and conduct of wicked men, many of this character, eſpecially ſuch as have put on a religious diſguiſe, have long been determined to reſiſt their cauſe, and ſcandalize their friends, as it ſhould ſeem, in their own defence; or, in other words, "becauſe "morality is againſt them, they will be "againſt morality."

THEIR moſt common and ſucceſsful method hath been, to caſt invidious reflections upon a general term, a meer word: morality, according to them, is a meager, deſpicable thing. But let morality only be analiſed into its eſſential parts, and the futility and injuſtice of the invective will immediately appear. What, for inſtance, can be objected

objected againſt juſtice, fidelity, meekneſs, humility, moderation, benevolence, and the whole circle of the moral virtues? Againſt theſe the moſt abandoned and deſperate blaſphemers have never dared to bring a direct accuſation. Theſe have always been juſtly eſteemed as the foundation, chief ornament, ſecurity and happineſs of all the beſt ſyſtems of civil government which were ever eſtabliſhed in the world, and of all the larger and leſſer aſſociations of men. But who ever heard of a law againſt "love, joy, peace, long-ſuffer-"ing, gentleneſs, goodneſs, fidelity, "meekneſs and temperance? Againſt "ſuch there is no law."

RELIGION likewiſe may be recommended as one of the moſt important objects of true zeal.

BY religion, I mean that ſupreme reverence for the Deity, which naturally

expreſſes itſelf in a regular courſe of pure worſhip, conſcientious obedience, and of all thoſe external acts of homage which tend to call forth and improve a true principle of piety. This, the great glory of man, raiſeth him above all the other creatures upon the earth; is inſeparably connected with pure morality, ſupplying, by means of its laws and ſanctions, the ſtrongeſt motives to the uniform practice of all the virtues; is the chief band of ſociety, being the only principle which can have faſt hold of the conſcience; and is the ſtrongeſt ground of the firm and joyful hope of a future righteous judgment.

But a ſucceſſion of errors and idolatries, and all kinds of immorality and impiety, had ſo far effaced theſe ſacred characters, that extraordinary interpoſitions of divine Providence became neceſſary, to reſtore them to their original purity, and to extend and perpetuate

tuate their ſalutary influence upon the whole human race. With this view the Chriſtian religion was introduced into the world; an event, of all others which are recorded in the hiſtory of mankind, the greateſt and moſt important ſince the creation. The chief deſign of this remarkable inſtance of divine wiſdom and goodneſs, was to revive in the minds of men, juſt ideas concerning the nature, perfections, and providence of God; to lead them to the regular worſhip of him, out of a pure heart; to draw their attention to its moral precepts, by a ſeries of the moſt wonderful works; and to carry all the virtues to their greateſt perfection, by its clear and comprehenſive manner of explaining them, by the excellent models with which it exemplifies them, and by the peculiar ſtrength of thoſe arguments and motives with which it recommends them.

THE greateſt excellence of the Chriſtian religion is, that it contains a ſyſtem of pure morals, which directly and moſt powerfully addreſſes itſelf to the underſtanding, conſcience, and all the nobleſt powers of the ſoul. It hath annexed to it, indeed, the mighty recompence of an everlaſting reward; but this reward partakes of the refined and ingenuous nature of the inſtitution itſelf; it applies to no mercenary principle; it gratifies no worldly paſſion; it is only to be beſtowed in a future ſtate, and is promiſed upon that condition alone, which is the neceſſary qualification for receiving and enjoying it. This, in ſhort, is the nature and excellence of the Chriſtian religion, which calleth for a warm and ſteady regard from all its friends.

IT hath enemies of different kinds: ſome are open and avowed; theſe are, however, comparatively fair and generous

rous antagoniſts; they are inoffenſive—beneficial to our cauſe, having drawn out from its ableſt and beſt advocates ſuch defences as, I truſt, the utmoſt efforts of all mankind can never overthrow. But the greateſt enemies of the Chriſtian religion have always been thoſe of her own houſe; the deepeſt and moſt dangerous wounds having been given her through the ſides of her ignorant and wicked profeſſors.

If any method could be taken to ſecure her from theſe, ſhe might ſafely bid defiance to the moſt violent attacks of all her other enemies, truſting to the natural effect of her doctrines and duties upon the minds and lives of men. But this effect would be much greater, if Chriſtians could be perſuaded to give a more general, regular, and conſcientious attendance upon public worſhip and all the other offices of their religion.

MANY of their miniſters have been, for ſome time, very earneſtly endeavouring to call their attention to the moral virtues; which was thought important and ſeaſonable, not only on account of their ſuperior excellence, but becauſe a zeal for external ſervices in religion appeared to be carried ſo far, as often to be ſubſtituted in the room of piety and morality. To abate and regulate this zeal much hath been, with great juſtice, urged concerning the ſmall comparative value of theſe outward ſervices. What the conſequence hath been, manifeſtly appears from experience. The freer Diſſenters, it muſt be confeſſed, are ſufficiently cured of ſuperſtition: but have not many of them gone, as is too often the caſe, out of one extreme into the other? It is poſſible that ſome of their miniſters themſelves, in their ardour for the end, may have too much diſcredited the means: certainly many, in their reſpective ſocieties, have tranſgreſſed

greſſed the preſcribed limits; and therefore we now conſiſtently ſtand forth as zealous advocates for public and private worſhip, and for all the poſitive inſtitutions of the Chriſtian religion, which are deemed neceſſary to the continuance of Chriſtianity among the common people, and which will be found to be very uſeful in reviving, eſtabliſhing, and improving in all, a true principle of piety.

BUT ſtill would we moſt earneſtly exhort our friends to direct their principal attention to the moral duties, and the peculiar motives of our religion. Let us ſtrive together, as with one hand and heart, to ſeparate it from all foreign appendages; to develope its whole nature, extend its genuine influence, and accompliſh its end, by promoting the reformation and happineſs of mankind.

PURE Chriſtianity indeed hath never received, nor ſought for any ſupport from

from the power and wealth either of ſtates or individuals: it offers no bribes to the ſenſes and inferior paſſions of men, nor exerciſes any arbitrary authority over the conſcience: the only force it uſes, is derived from the native power of truth; and the only favours it aſks, are a juſt repreſentation and a fair hearing. It can have no aſſiſtance from any other quarter: it needeth none; for the ſtrength and perſpicuity of its reaſonings, and the charms of its virtues, are ſufficient to carry irreſiſtible conviction into all unprejudiced and attentive minds.

But alas! this moſt excellent form of religion hath long ſuffered a great and general corruption; having been converted, by the ſuperſtitions, immoralities, and ſelfiſh ſchemes of men, into an ignorant, prejudiced, perſecuting zeal for falſe, doubtful, or trifling ſpeculations, and expenſive, impious,

or

or inſignificant ceremonies. Out of theſe materials hath been framed the Romiſh hierarchy, a large Gothic ſtructure, which hath been raiſed, by the united vigorous efforts of prieſts and politicians, upon the ruins of common ſenſe, private property, civil and religious liberty, and all the greateſt bleſſings of ſociety; and which is ſtill ſupported by the ſame intimate and powerful combination, together with the ignorant and furious zeal of the people, who were, at firſt, allured into ſlavery by pompous deceitful appearances, and have, ever ſince, been induſtriouſly rivetting their own chains. This magnificent pile, which hath long lifted up its head ſo high into the ſkies, and may be thought by many to be growing ſtronger as well as more venerable by age, having a ſandy foundation, muſt, I doubt not, in ſome future period, fall to the ground.

BUT ſo great a revolution is not to be expected from the utmoſt, ableſt endeavours

endeavours of a few ſeparate individuals; it being only, I think, to be accompliſhed by the united, perſevering, and moſt vigorous exertions of great numbers amongſt the wiſeſt and beſt of mankind. A cloſe-compacted body, compoſed of all the moſt powerful, conſiſtent, and ſteady friends of inquiry, liberty, and charity—formed and held together by a determined reſolution to ſupport and advance, to the utmoſt, the common intereſt—would, I truſt, be fully adequate to the mighty attempt. But this is to conſtitute a new æra in the annals of time; and, whenever it takes place, it will be the nobleſt union which was ever formed amongſt men.

SOMETHING, not inconſiderable, hath already been done. With this view a brave army of Proteſtant martyrs long ſince ſtood forth; made a reſolute oppoſition to tyranny and ſuperſtition; and cleared away much rubbiſh which had,

had, for many ages, disfigured and incumbered the Chriſtian ſcheme. However, though their attempts were great and proſperous, much was left for poſterity to finiſh.

BUT how have their ſucceſſors acquitted themſelves under their peculiar advantages? Satisfied with thoſe improvements which were made to their hands, they ſat down, and have hitherto generally continued, upon their predeceſſors ground; and have now eſtabliſhed, and even conſecrated all the remaining ſuperſtitions and errors. Articles and modes of human invention, and the power and policy of the world, have been ſo long interwoven with that which would otherwiſe have been the pureſt form of the Chriſtian religion, that it is likely to afford ſufficient employment for ages wholly to unravel the piece. To Providence and time I leave theſe great, theſe probably diſtant events, and now turn again to ourſelves.

LET

LET us endeavour to unite more cloſely with all the friends of reaſon and liberty within the different ſpheres of our reſpective influence, and eſpecially with thoſe of our own religious profeſſion. But I deſire not to be underſtood as pleading for a party, at leaſt with the narrow views of a party-ſpirit. If I venture, in this public manner, to contend for a general concurrence in the hearty and ſteadfaſt ſupport of the diſſenting intereſt, it is becauſe that intereſt ſeems to be eſſentially connected with free inquiry, the right of private judgment, and liberty of conſcience in religion. Theſe are the birth-right of human nature, the charter of the Chriſtian religion, and the claim of Proteſtants of every denomination, in all their diſputes with thoſe who would infringe upon them; but they are eminently, and, I think, moſt conſiſtently our real and profeſſed principles. Upon this foundation I, in the moſt

ſolemn

ſolemn and earneſt manner, exhort the Proteſtant Diſſenters in general to be unanimous and hearty in ſupport of their common cauſe; partly on account of its great importance, but eſpecially becauſe it is at this time manifeſtly in a declining ſtate.

THE influence which the national mode of religion, becauſe it hath long prevailed, hath on the minds of men, connexions with great perſonages, the tempting baits of honorary and lucrative offices, family alliances, and private diſguſts, are often making great depredations upon us, and depriving us of thoſe who might now have been among the principal ſupports of the diſſenting intereſt. But theſe motives are evidently foreign to the nature of religion, and therefore they prove, that the perſons, influenced by them, were either altogether ignorant, or regardleſs of what ought to have been their peculiar principles.

AND

And many of thoſe who continue amongſt us, eſpecially the rich, the young and the gay, take ſuch conſtant care to have theſe peculiar principles ſit looſely upon them, that they can, at any time, eaſily throw them off, whenever intereſt, convenience or humour, may call for an exchange of religious profeſſion. Or if, from the influence of education, habit, or ſome better principle, many of theſe adhere to the ſect amongſt which they were brought up; they are often unconcerned about the ſupport of the general intereſt, ſeldom extending their views beyond the little circle of their ſtated fellow-worſhippers, and being fully ſatisfied, if their own ſociety be, externally, in a flouriſhing condition.

But—which is ſtill more lamentable—there are many, amongſt the true friends to religious liberty at large, and the moſt public, ſteady and zealous advocates

vocates for the diſſenting intereſt in particular, who loſe the greateſt part of their ability to promote it, by continuing all their lives in an unconnected ſtate.

SUPERSTITION, enthuſiaſm, ambition, intereſt, pleaſure, and almoſt all the vices, can eaſily collect and combine their forces together; whilſt the votaries of the moral virtues, and of a rational ſyſtem of religion, have never yet, that I know of, been able to form amongſt them one general laſting bond of union. What have been the cauſes of that rapid progreſs which the arts and ſciences have lately made towards perfection? Hath not one principal cauſe been enthuſiaſm? I will not, dare not, plead for it in religion, on account of the inexpreſſible damage which religion hath already ſuffered from the wild rhapſodies of ignorant and extravagant myſtics. But where could be

the harm, if a fair trial were made, by numbers intimately united together, of a temperate, permanent ardor in its cauſe? Whilſt reaſon ſits at the helm, the briſker gales of a warm and active zeal may be ſafely truſted; ſuch a zeal being always friendly to religion, and, in general, uſeful—neceſſary, in the voyage of life.

O FOR an attractive, cementing principle, to draw the ſeveral ſcattered individuals of our own profeſſion into a body, and to hold them together! The propoſal of ſome great and uſeful ſcheme might have this power of attraction; and the united, ſteadfaſt, and vigorous proſecution of it, would certainly be a firm cement. But I muſt only at preſent indulge myſelf in giving a brief diſtant hint upon this ſubject; leaving it to the bleſſing of Divine Providence upon the zealous and unanimous endeavours of men, in ſome future period, to improve upon

upon it, to produce at the proper ſeaſon ſome important ſcheme to public view, and to carry it into execution.

WHAT now remains, but that I exhort my brethren in the miniſtry, to be more diligent and conſcientious for the future in diſcharging their peculiar duties; to diſcover more of an uniting ſpirit with each other, and to pay a more ſteady and zealous attention to the common intereſt. Let all diſſenting miniſters, and people, endeavour more and more to ſtrengthen the hands and hearts of each other, and of all the friends of truth, inquiry, liberty and charity around them; and be one in ſupport of the general cauſe; remembering that, however elſe we may be diſtinguiſhed, we make the ſame profeſſion, as Diſſenters, Proteſtants, and Chriſtians. Let us therefore ſtrive to form ourſelves more upon the pure model of our religion; that, united by

its genuine principles, animated by its true ſpirit, and adorned by its excellent virtues, we may moſt effectually contribute to its ſupport amongſt men, and enjoy its peculiar honours and rewards, both in this world and in that which is to come. Amen.

DISCOURSE III.

ON THE

CHARACTER,

OFFICES AND QUALIFICATIONS

OF THE

CHRISTIAN PREACHER.

DISCOURSE III.

TITUS II. 15.

THESE THINGS SPEAK AND EXHORT.

THE inſtitutions of religious worſhip are the great inſtruments, which the providence of God employs for the moral and religious improvement of mankind: the manner, in which they are obſerved, muſt therefore be a general concern; and the character and conduct of the perſons who are choſen to conduct them, muſt be highly intereſting to all the members of religious ſocieties. For this reaſon, it is hoped, the account, which I propoſe now to give of the qualifica-

tions and offices of the Chriſtian preacher, will engage the attention of Chriſtians in general; for, though it merits the particular regard of thoſe who are called to preach, yet it may be of uſe to all, by ſerving to regulate their expectations from their miniſters, and to ſecure a proper attention to their perſons and ſervices.

THE employment itſelf will naturally point out its end, to thoſe who conſider the connexion which it has with the Chriſtian religion. This inſtitution having no other aim, than to promote the holineſs of thoſe who ſubmit to it, its preachers will of courſe direct all their endeavours to this purpoſe: in other words, the improvement of virtue amongſt his hearers, will be the great object of the miniſtrations of the Chriſtian preacher.

WITH this idea of the deſign of the office, I cannot but think highly of it; and

and muſt reckon thoſe, who enter into it with juſt ſentiments, to be worthy of ſome peculiar regard. It is the moſt uſeful, and therefore the moſt honourable buſineſs, in which any perſon can be concerned; and he muſt be of a low and groveling diſpoſition, who has ſlight notions of the office itſelf, or of thoſe, who with right views engage in it. All the friends of virtue and religion approve of this cauſe, have a high eſteem for thoſe who faithfully apply themſelves to its ſupport, and unite in wiſhing them ſucceſs.

§. I.

THE preacher himſelf, under the influence of this opinion of the objects of his miniſtry, will naturally fall into that ſtrain of preaching which is moſt favourable to them; and purſue thoſe ſtudies, and ſeek that kind of knowledge, which will qualify him to give the

the juſteſt views of the Chriſtian character, and to perſuade his hearers to a "converſation agreeable to the Goſpel of Chriſt."

In particular, this will incline him to the choice of ſuch ſubjects for his public diſcourſes, as have the beſt moral tendency. As the only foundation of a virtuous character is a juſt idea of its nature, he will not fail to uſe his beſt endeavours to this purpoſe. Every one who wiſhes to acquire it himſelf, or to aſſiſt others in forming or improving it, will be particularly careful, that his conceptions of the ſubject be as clear and preciſe as poſſible.

In order to this, he ſhould have an accurate knowledge of the human mind, and of the influence which a juſt diſcipline will have on its improvement and perfection. For the mind which is the moſt improved, which makes the neareſt approaches

approaches to the excellence for which it was intended, is clearly the moſt virtuous, the moſt holy, the moſt like to God, or by whatever other name perfection of character may be expreſſed. To this general knowledge of the character ſhould be added, ſuch a diſtinct conception of the ſeveral virtues, of their true nature, and offices, as will enable him eaſily to diſtinguiſh them from each other, and to perceive the effect which they ſeverally have, to form that beauty and excellence, which is the end of morality, and of religion itſelf with all its inſtitutions.

FROM hence it naturally follows, that the preacher ſhould pay a very particular attention to ſuch ſtudies, as will increaſe his knowledge of human nature, and as will direct to the moſt uſeful methods of cultivating the virtues of the human mind. It will alſo be very deſirable to have at hand a juſt de-

finition

finition of every particular virtue. This will qualify him, as there ſhall be occaſion, to give a preciſe and clear deſcription of each, ſo as not to confound it with any other, or to leave out any thing which is neceſſary to the full comprehenſion of it.

For the ſame reaſon that the preacher ſtudies theſe things himſelf, he will take every proper opportunity to explain them in his diſcourſes; that thoſe who hear, having a clear view of the path which they have to tread, may enter upon it with confidence, and proceed therein with increaſing ſatisfaction: thus will it be "like the ſhining "light, which ſhineth more and more "unto the perfect day;" and thoſe who frequent it, will have the diſtinguiſhing ornaments of a good underſtanding and a well-furniſhed mind.

But let me not be miſtaken; I would not be underſtood to recommend an abſtruſe

abſtruſe method of preaching. The plaineſt ſubjects ſhould always be preferred in public diſcourſes; and the manner of treating them be as obvious and familiar, as the ſerioufneſs and dignity of religious worſhip will admit. But plainneſs and accuracy are by no means inconſiſtent: there may be all the exactneſs which true logic preſcribes, where there is nothing of the form of it. In a diſcourſe, however, which is to be heard only, it may be convenient to amplify and illuſtrate in a more diffuſe manner, than would be neceſſary if it were to be read; and ſometimes even to repeat what has been already delivered. Nothing, in ſhort, ſhould be omitted by the preacher, which may conduce to give thoſe to whom he addreſſes himſelf on ſuch important points, a clear idea of the ſubject which he is laying before them; ſo as to enable them, if attentive, to diſtinguiſh it from every other, and to perceive what particular

ticular duty is recommended to their practice. Thus, when he proceeds to the affectionate or pathetic parts of the diſcourſe, and uſes that earneſt perſuaſion, to which a practical ſermon will naturally direct him, he will not leave his hearers any room to complain, that very powerful motives have been laid before them, and great earneſtneſs uſed; but that they cannot diſcover to what the ſpeaker intends to incline them.

THIS is the inſtruction, which his hearers may expect from the Chriſtian preacher—the true nature of the virtues which they ſhould cultivate, and their offices in the ſeveral relations of life.

IT will be eaſy to conclude from what has been ſaid, that I would recommend it to a miniſter, to diſcourſe frequently on the duties of ſocial, relative, and domeſtic life; and yet I think it neceſſary to point them out out in a more parti-

particular manner, as theſe are ſubjects, which are not ſo often conſidered, as their vaſt importance requires. They are not, I confeſs, the eaſieſt kind of compoſitions; they require at leaſt as much ſtudy and attention as almoſt any other; and there may be ſome danger, in deſcending to particulars, of appearing to point at individuals or their families. The difficulty of treating on theſe duties is, however, no ſufficient reaſon for excluding them from our public diſcourſes; but ſhould engage us to conſider them very attentively, and to enter into the neceſſary detail with great caution and prudence. With the help of theſe hints, even a young preacher, who has ſome little knowledge of the world, and is of a delicate turn of mind, may do juſtice to ſubjects of this ſort without diſguſting any of his hearers, and ſo as to afford inſtruction to all. But whether it will be better to do this by particular ſet diſcourſes

courſes on the duties of perſons in the ſeveral relations of life; or by applying general ſubjects to their particular uſe, as they ſhall appear to ſuit their ſituation and circumſtances; or whether both methods ſhould be adopted, muſt be left to the prudence of every miniſter to determine.

THIS is one part of the duty of a Chriſtian preacher; to give a juſt deſcription of the temper and character which the profeſſors of the Chriſtian religion ſhould maintain: but the more important and the more difficult part ſtill remains to be conſidered, which is, to perſuade them to cultivate virtuous diſpoſitions, and to act under their influence.

§. II.

IT is the buſineſs of every public ſpeaker both to inſtruct and to perſuade.

That

That he ſpeak with clearneſs and preciſion, is ſo indiſpenſable, that he cannot hope for the leaſt ſucceſs without it: but it is only preparatory to what ſhould be his chief object, to move the affections, and determine the will. The artiſt ſhould underſtand the principles of the art which he is to follow, the works which it is deſigned to produce, and the inſtruments which it uſes, before he can with any propriety apply them; but this will not be ſufficient to incite his induſtry and application, without a view of the probable advantages or honours which will attend the proſecution. The politician ſhould learn what meaſures will ſecure this or the other purpoſe, the probable conſequences of alliances or wars, and the like; but in order to influence him in action, he muſt ſee the connexion which they have with his particular views, and their tendency to the accompliſhment of his deſigns.

IT is the ſame with thoſe who undertake to ſpeak on the higheſt of all arts, that of carrying the powers of the human mind to their greateſt perfection. This being laid down as the end, and the means conducive to it repreſented; what naturally follows, in order to the accompliſhment of the ſpeaker's intention, is to give ſuch a view of the end itſelf, or the ſeveral progreſſive ſteps by which it may be gained, as will incite to action, encourage every generous effort, and engage that perſeverance which may be effectual to the ultimate purpoſe.

THE ſpeaker, who has not taken ſome ſuch view as this of the employment, and learnt to diſtinguiſh between inſtruction and perſuaſion, can have no great proſpect of ſucceſs, on whatever ſubjects he undertakes to ſpeak; and leaſt of all, perhaps, as a preacher of religion, where bare inſtruction will have

have exactly the ſame ſignificance as knowledge without practice.

As to the topics of perſuaſion, to which the Chriſtian orator ſhould have recourſe, the advice which ſome give is to inſiſt much on the native beauty and excellence of virtue, and to repreſent it as the great inſtrument of happineſs to the human race, which the righteous Governor of the world employs to bleſs mankind, and to make them bleſſings to each other: thus, ſay they, will men be formed to ſincere diſintereſted virtue, and learn to exerciſe their benevolent affections, not with a view to their own private advantage, but to that of their fellow-creatures: if on the contrary, you enlarge on the advantages which will accrue to themſelves from their virtue; or on the rewards annexed to it in the preſent or the future world, there is ſome danger, leſt by promoting a ſelfiſh, mercenary

temper, you corrupt the mind inſtead of improving it, and encourage a view to private intereſt, till nothing generous or worthy of reward remain.

WITH what zeal and vehemence ſome declaim againſt this method of preaching, and with what contempt it is ſpoken of by others, is well known. Their advice to the young preacher is, "Leave theſe ſubjects to the philoſo-" phers, in whom they will be more " becoming; but let your arguments and " motives be drawn from religion, from " the will and authority of God, from " the peculiar doctrines of the Chriſtian " religion, from the example of Chriſt, " and from the important ſanctions of " future rewards and puniſhments."

BUT what occaſion is there to omit either? Or where is the prudence of undervaluing any method of addreſs, which has the leaſt tendency to promote a holy

or

or virtuous temper? Can there be any thing wrong in endeavouring to perſuade our Chriſtian brethren, that the courſe, to which we direct them, is moſt reaſonable and becoming, agreeable to their nature, and the higheſt improvement of their moral powers? Is it not ſerving the cauſe of virtue to ſhew, that it is the perfection of the human mind; and that it leads to the moſt pleaſing, uſeful exerciſe of the high capacities, with which we are diſtinguiſhed? It is right likewiſe to repreſent it as the reſtorer of a corrupt, depraved nature: and as ſupplying the moſt effectual cure of the diſorders which vice has introduced. The fault does not lie in inſiſting on theſe particulars; but in confining ourſelves to them; and omitting the more intereſting and affecting arguments, which religion in general, and eſpecially the Chriſtian religion ſupplies.

Nor does there appear to be any juſt ground for the apprehenſion, that the cauſe of virtue will be injured by ſhewing, that it ſecures the higheſt advantages to thoſe who practiſe it. It would bring ſome reflection on virtue itſelf, or on the righteous Governor of the world, if the general courſe and order of events were not favourable to the happineſs of thoſe who are the moſt excellent of their ſpecies: and it would be ſtrange indeed, if a revelation from God, which ſhould contain the diſcovery of any extraordinary bleſſings in the preſent or in a future ſtate, did not annex them to thoſe qualities, which we univerſally approve in ourſelves and others. It appears then to be a plain matter of fact, and to have every confirmation which the ſacred Scriptures can give it, that ſome peculiar advantages preſent and future are annexed to the virtuous character; and there cannot ſurely be any inconvenience in holding

ing it up to the attention of mankind. What the Chriſtian religion teaches with regard to the preſent, and eſpecially the future rewards of thoſe who keep the commandments of God, is ſo well known, as to make it unneceſſary to add any thing in proof of it.

IT may appear ſurpriſing, that there ſhould be this difference of opinion on ſo intereſting a ſubject; and that the real friends of virtue (for this I ſuppoſe to be the caſe) ſhould differ ſo widely in the methods which they take for its ſupport. Thoſe who have no good-will to religion, are ſometimes ſtrenuous advocates for virtue; and for this reaſon, perhaps, ſome of the loudeſt declaimers for religion have been fond of decrying moral virtues. That ſuch oppoſite opinions of virtue and religion ſhould lead to different ways of explaining and enforcing their reſpective offices, cannot be matter of juſt ſurpriſe;

and it may perhaps be a ſufficient explanation of a ſimilar diverſity amongſt thoſe who are hearty friends to both theſe intereſts, that it has happened in conſequence of their being nearer to one or the other of the extremes, which have juſt been deſcribed.

But there is another, and perhaps a better account to be given of this extraordinary fact, that good men have taken ſuch very different methods to ſupport the ſame cauſe. Thoſe who are acquainted with the ſtate of opinions in the Chriſtian church in the preſent and paſt ages, do not need to be informed, that a very great ſtreſs has been laid on the argument for a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments, from the unequal diſtribution of good and evil which it was thought appeared in the preſent. This argument being once introduced, the friends of the truth, which it was intended to ſupport, believed

lieved it impoſſible to lay too great weight upon it, or to carry it too far. Hence it is, that ſo much has been ſaid on the advantages of vice, and the evils of virtue, in the preſent ſtate, as to leave it almoſt doubtful whether of the two were in itſelf more eligible. It naturally occurred to the wiſer friends of religion, that ſome of its advocates were in danger of injuring it, by the very attempts which they made for its ſupport. They were apprehenſive, that ſo tragical a diſplay of preſent diſorders, could afford no good preſumption of future order; and that, if virtue were not worthy of our choice for its own ſake, there could be no reaſonable hope of its receiving any extraordinary reward in the preſent, or in any future period of our exiſtence. The natural conſequence of this would be, that on one ſide, virtue would be enforced by the conſideration of its native excellence; and on the other, by the hope of the future

future rewards annexed to it: and the advocates for each, would perhaps go greater lengths in their reſpective opinions, in conſequence of their mutual oppoſition.

But whatever they may determine on the queſtion, Whether the diſtributions of Providence in this life will lead us to expect another? it muſt be matter of grief to good men, to ſee the friends of virtue and practical religion ſo much inclined to depreciate each other's arguments, and methods of addreſs. Is it indeed to be feared, leſt too many or too powerful arguments ſhould be urged, to perſuade to the duties of a good life? All that can be done in every way, will be little enough to reſtrain the irregularities of the human will, to bring the paſſions into ſubjection, and to diſpoſe men to a juſt and regular conduct.

I WILL not ſcruple, therefore, to recommend it to the Chriſtian preacher, to introduce into his diſcourſes every inforcement of virtue, which ſhall offer itſelf; and to undervalue no argument, which ſhall appear to conduce, in how low a degree ſoever, to the moral improvement of his hearers.

WHAT has been ſaid of the duties of religion, will lead to the proper uſe, and right ſtudy of its doctrines. The eaſieſt, beſt view which can be given of them, is to repreſent them as the grand motives by which the precepts of religion are enforced. Thus ſhall we clearly determine their reſpective importance, and the ſtreſs which ſhould be laid on them in our public diſcourſes; for the value of every truth is, its influence on the temper and behaviour of thoſe who receive it. It is impoſſible, however, that religious truths ſhould be applied to their proper uſe, till we know

know what they are; ſo that it is incumbent on every one, who wiſhes to improve his character thereby, to ſtudy them with all diligence: and this is more eſpecially the concern of the Chriſtian preacher, who will have ſo many calls to lay them before his hearers, in order to enrich their minds with thoſe ſentiments, which may ſerve to direct their willing feet into the way of God's commandments.

THE knowledge of religion is to be drawn from the works, and eſpecially from the word of God. What inſtruction may be drawn from the works of God, it is not perhaps ſo eaſy to ſay. Reaſon ſometimes aſſumes the merit of diſcovering what is received by tradition. The original of certain opinions is ſo remote, that they cannot be eaſily traced up to their ſource, and are therefore ſuppoſed to be the natural dictates of the human underſtanding, or what

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it brings to light by the uſe of its own powers. Others again form a ſyſtem in their own minds, by the united aid of natural and revealed religion; and then ſetting themſelves to determine, what they owe to the one, and the other, they impute every thing which they can deduce, by probable arguments from firſt principles, to the teaching of nature; and refer to revelation thoſe truths alone, which do not eaſily admit of this deduction.* This appears to be the caſe with ſome of thoſe writers who have favoured the world with diſcourſes on natural and revealed religion; and with ſome too, who have aſſumed the

* DR. PRIESTLEY (in his *Inſtitutes of Natural and Revealed Religion*) vol. I. p. 4. ſays, "I ſhall include "under the head of *natural religion* all that can be "demonſtrated or proved to be true, though it was "never, in fact, diſcovered by it; and even though it "be probable, that mankind would never have known "it without the aſſiſtance of revelation. Thus the "doctrine of a future ſtate may be called a doctrine of "natural religion, if when we have had the firſt know-

ledge

the pompous title of demonſtration. They have ſat down with all the opinions in their minds, of which they intended to give the detail; and inſtead of marking out the progreſs of their ideas, and directing to the true ſources of their knowledge, they have repreſented thoſe truths, as branches of natural religion, which moſt probably owe their original to divine revelation; or at leaſt they have given no certain criterion, by which to ſeparate the one from the other.

If we inquire into the ſtate of opinions on moral and religious ſubjects, in thoſe countries which have not en-

" ledge of it from divine revelation, we can afterwards " ſhow, that the expectation of it was probable from " the light of nature, and that preſent appearances are " upon the whole favourable to the ſuppoſition of it." I ſhall make no remarks on this rule of diviſion, only refer it to the conſideration of this truly ingenious and learned writer, whether it will not reduce every doctrine of revealed, to the head of natural religion.

joyed

joyed the light of revealed truth, we ſhall perceive that they ſtood in great need of farther inſtruction; and wanted more preciſe ideas of the rule of life, and more effectual motives to obſerve it, than their own reaſonings afforded. Whether this was owing to the peculiar difficulty of the ſubject to perſons in their ſituation, or to their not making a proper uſe of the lights which they had, I ſhall not take upon me to determine.

I AM far, however, from denying the reality of natural religion. It is, on the contrary, eſſential to the very being of religion, that certain doctrines be eſtabliſhed in our minds, previous to the ſtudy of divine revelation; and thoſe who acknowledge no natural truths, if they are not the ſecret enemies of ſuch as are revealed, cannot be allowed to be the wiſeſt and moſt conſiſtent

ſiſtent defenders of them. Who, for inſtance, can with any propriety ſpeak of a revelation from God, unleſs he have ſome previous knowledge of God? What notions can he have of a power to violate or control the laws of nature, and thereby to prove the extraordinary interpoſition of Heaven, who does not acknowledge a regular orderly courſe, which falls under the direction of the Supreme Intelligence? Or how can he conſider the teſtimony of God, as giving undoubted certainty to any ſcheme of opinions, who is not firſt convinced of the divine knowledge and veracity?

I WILL not ſcruple, therefore, to adviſe ſuch as are training up for the office of preachers, to inquire into the truths of religion in the uſual method; and to begin with taking a view of the principles of natural, and from thence to proceed to thoſe of revealed religion.

§. III.

§. III.

THE works of God lie open to our inſpection; and, by their grandeur and beauty, invite us to conſider them. They contain ſuch a variety of particulars, and ſo conſtantly preſent us with ſomething new and ſurpriſing, that the moſt minute inquiries are only the more pleaſing, the further they are purſued. No other ſtudy is ſo well adapted to elevate our minds, and to give us the moſt ſublime conceptions. But its trueſt, beſt uſe, is to furniſh to our view the moſt ſtriking proofs of the power, wiſdom, and goodneſs of the Creator of all. This goodly frame ſhould engage the attention of every man, as far as his leiſure and abilities ſerve; and he, whoſe buſineſs it is to impart religious inſtructions, ſhould, above all others, be careful to enrich his mind

with the notions which ſuch reſearches will give.

It is a ſmall portion only of the works of nature, which falls under the notice of man; and there is not any part, of which he can have a full comprehenſion: but wherever he turns his eyes, he will ſee the plaineſt marks of a preſiding intelligence, and of the moſt wiſe and benevolent purpoſes. Appearances of evil, it is true, as well as of good, will riſe up before his ſight, in the progreſs of his inquiries; but it will not be difficult for him to determine, which is the character of the workmanſhip. Thoſe things which, on the firſt view, appear to be marks of imperfection, and preſumptions againſt a prevailing, good deſign, a more careful examination will diſcover to be real perfections, and inſtances of the good order, of which a general view of the whole will eaſily convince the candid

did inquirer. An acquaintance with the works of the ancients, will ſupply a long liſt of ſuppoſed faults in the conſtitution and government of the univerſe: but it is remarkable, that the more accurate inquiries, and the more enlarged knowledge of ſucceeding ages, have diſcovered the propriety of what had been before condemned; and found out very great advantages in the very things, which had been pitched upon as inſtances of a doubtful or evil deſign. This ſhould teach us to be very cautious, how we cenſure Nature and Providence; and will afford a fair preſumption, that all improvements in natural knowledge will ſtrengthen the evidence for religion, and produce a growing conviction, that the general happineſs is the deſign and end of the whole, and of every part.*

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* THESE hints, it is apprehended, may lead to a ſatisfactory anſwer to the objections, which have lately been

THE manner of ſtudying this uſeful ſcience will be different, as the ſituation and talents of thoſe who are engaged in it differ. Some will purſue it with greater advantages; others, with fewer. The man of genius, who has, beſides, the opportunity of making the proper experiments, not content with what is already known, will purſue his inquiries into new ſubjects; and on thoſe which have been already conſidered, will be ſtudious to confirm ſuch deductions as have been fairly made, to remove what is ſuperfluous, and to prune away the errors: and he will employ his beſt abilities, to prepare the way for thoſe who ſhall chuſe to tread the ſame path in the preſent, and ſucceeding ages. Well aware of the deſign and uſe of experiments, he will never neglect to make them, but purſue this

been made, to the prevalence of a wiſe and benevolent deſign in Nature, in Hume's *Poſthumous Dialogue on Natural Religion.*

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track with unremitting induſtry and ardour; for he knows, that the ſyſtem which wants this ſupport is only conjectural, and may be prejudicial to real knowledge. He will not, however, be ſo timid, as to decline hazarding an hypotheſis which is plauſible; but will fairly propoſe it; and, after a juſt account of its ſtrength and weakneſs, will leave it to his ſucceſſors to eſtabliſh, or take it away.

OTHERS find themſelves obliged to proceed in a different way. They have not the opportunity of making any new experiments, or they want the ſkill to apply them to their proper uſe; or they may not have it in their power, ſo much as to repeat the experiments which have been already made. It remains for them to peruſe ſuch records of facts, as they are able to procure; and after ſatisfying themſelves of their authenticity, to draw the juſt concluſion.

A MAN, however, need not be a philoſopher, or even be much acquainted with the writings of the philoſophers, to learn the true character of the works of creation, and of their Author. All that is requiſite, is to open his eyes on the ſcene which preſents itſelf, to examine the more ſtriking appearances, and the more obvious properties of the beings with which he is ſurrounded; and this, it is apprehended, will be ſufficient to convince one, who can proceed no further, that what he beholds, is the work of a wiſe and good Being.

IT is eaſy to conclude, that in the ſtudy of nature every one will direct his more particular inquiries to the parts, in which he is moſt nearly intereſted. The huſbandman, for inſtance, to the difference of ſoils, the various productions of each, and the animals to which they are moſt ſuitable: the artiſt

artiſt, to the particular bodies on which his art is employed: the philoſopher, to thoſe objects which appear moſt conducive to his knowledge of the whole. Would it not be ſtrange, if in this predilection which almoſt all make, that which is moſt intereſting to every individual ſhould be moſt generally neglected? Shall we ſay that the ſtudy of man, which it concerns every one to purſue, gains leſs attention than any other? The uſes of this branch of knowledge are yet ſo many and ſo obvious, that they cannot eaſily eſcape the obſervation of the moſt careleſs inquirer. How many are the inſtances of deſign, which riſe to view in the examination of the human body! The firſt and moſt obvious appearances clearly indicate a wiſe and benevolent intention in its formation; and the more accurate reſearches, which reveal the ſtructure of its internal parts, bring to light additional confirmations of the ſame pleaſing

truth, that it is the work of ſupreme intelligence and perfect goodneſs. But the faireſt characters of the Being from whom it is derived, are to be found in the human mind: its powers of perceiving and judging, of compounding and ſeparating its ideas, of comparing them with each other, and drawing concluſions from them, and of diſpoſing the truths it has diſcovered into a juſt and orderly treatiſe, directly lead the thoughts of the obſerver to His wiſdom, who is the fountain of theſe ſtreams. In like manner, the affections which concern the individual, and conduce to his preſervation and enjoyment; and the more amiable diſpoſitions, which unite him to the ſpecies, and engage him to ſeek and rejoice in the common good, are the moſt unequivocal marks of the benevolence which is concerned in his production. Examine the moral powers of man, follow him into his ſocial connexions, and conſider him as the

the member of a private family, or a larger community; obſerve the natural exerciſe and obvious tendency of domeſtic and civil government to co-operate with his moral nature, and to direct him to the affectionate approbation of virtue, and to the juſt cenſure of vice; and you will ſee the openings of a moral ſcheme, and the ſtrongeſt preſumptions of a righteous government, which diſtributes good and evil to all its ſubjects, in proportion to their ſeveral characters. The ſketch of this juſt adminiſtration, begun in this preſent world, will encourage every conſiderate perſon to expect a future ſtate of righteous retribution; and will prepare him to receive the diſcoveries, which divine revelation makes, on this ſubject, with greater confidence.

THIS is a ſmall ſpecimen of the uſe which may be made of the ſtudy of man, to confirm and illuſtrate the doctrines

trines of religion. How diſproportionate ſuch an outline is, to the importance and extent of the ſubject, will be readily allowed. It may, however, be ſufficient to ſhew how many, and what excellent, materials this ſcience furniſhes; and to awaken a more general attention to it. It cannot admit of a doubt, but that from this ſource the Chriſtian preacher may draw thoſe waters, which will refreſh and ſtrengthen his hearers, and prepare them to accompliſh the journey to which he directs them. Whatever, therefore, will enlarge and improve his ideas on this ſubject, ſuch as his own careful and repeated obſervations, and the diligent peruſal of thoſe which have been made by others, particularly in the inſtructive pages of the wiſe hiſtorian, will invite his warm and eager purſuit.

My opinion of the uſe of civil hiſtory, will be eaſily collected from this hint.

hint. But I reckon the advantages with which it is attended ſo very great, that I cannot paſs over the ſubject, without a more particular inquiry into them. It offers itſelf to our firſt view, under the moſt pleaſing appearance, as a deſcription of man, and a relation of his ſentiments and actions. It would be ſtrange indeed, if the hiſtory of the lion, the horſe, and even of other inferior animals, ſhould intereſt us, and we ſhould be at much pains to trace out their nature and properties; and not have the ſame, or even a higher curioſity to improve our ideas of human nature, by ſimilar inquiries. Every one almoſt is pleaſed with the portraits of man, which fiction preſents; and the books which contain them are read with an avidity, which the greateſt plenty is incapable of ſatiating, and the moſt glaring faults cannot entirely ſuppreſs. And what, after all, can we ſay in favour of the beſt of them, more than

than this, that they contain a pleaſing repreſentation of the theory which the writer has framed, concerning the diſpoſitions and affections of the human mind? Let us ſuppoſe it to be a true one; ſo far then the work is innocent: but if, as is more probable, it be infected with prejudices and errors, it will have the demerit of expoſing them in a way, which will procure them the eaſieſt admiſſion with thoſe who read. Hiſtory, which does not invent facts and ſituations, but repreſents them as they are found to be, is not liable to this objection: ſo far from this, it is calculated to convey very uſeful inſtructions on the moſt intereſting of all ſubjects.

I AM well aware that it will be objected, that this repreſentation of the uſe of hiſtory is ideal; and that there are few, if any, writings of this kind, to which it will apply. The chief

events

events which they contain, are battles; and the preparations for them, their operations, and conſequences, are the principal circumſtances which they afford, to awaken and engage the attention of the reader. His humanity is continually ſhocked, by the relation of ſuch vaſt numbers of his own ſpecies drawn up in array againſt each other, furniſhed with every thing which the utmoſt ingenuity can invent, for their mutual deſtruction; and by the detail which preſently follows, of the wounded and ſlain, with all the ſubſequent horrors of this unnatural practice.

IT is a mortifying reflection, that the hiſtory of the world ſhould ſo generally be a repreſentation of ſuch unpleaſing ſcenes; that the ſubſtance of all the relations which it contains, ſhould be the crimes of men, and the evils with which they are attended. This, however, is ſometimes as much the fault of

of the hiſtorian, as of his ſubject. He is ſo ſtruck with the events which awaken the tender paſſions, that he allows them the principal place in his work; and employs all the eloquence which he poſſeſſes, to give an affecting deſcription of them: whilſt the more numerous facts, which afford a pleaſing likeneſs of human nature, which ſhew how the enjoyments of individuals are procured, how families ſubſiſt, and how larger ſocieties are formed, are paſſed over in ſilence, or ſo ſlightly touched, as to make little or no impreſſion on the reader's mind.

THERE is a ſtrange propenſity in men, to dwell on the dark ſide of our common nature; and to entertain themſelves and others with deſcriptions of the follies and vices of men, in thoſe ſubjects, in which they appear peculiarly ridiculous or flagitious. They are fonder of ſatire, than panegyric; and the

the lives of Nero or Domitian are more inquired after, than thoſe of Titus, Trajan, or Marcus Aurelius.

WHATEVER elſe the hiſtorian be, he is, however, for the moſt part, true to the cauſe of virtue, which, as often as he has occaſion to deſcribe, he holds up to the approbation of all; whilſt the pictures which he gives of vice, are ſuch as excite a general indignation. In this view, hiſtory merits the particular attention of thoſe, who read to improve their moral and religious ſentiments. "It is a remark," ſays Hume,* "worthy the attention of the ſpecula-"tive reader, that the hiſtorians have "been almoſt without exception the "true friends of virtue, and have always "repreſented it in its proper colours, "however they may have erred in their "judgments of particular perſons."

* *Moral and Political Eſſays*, vol. I. p. 75. Edin. 1742.

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NOR is the danger ſo great, as may be apprehended, of taking up opinions unfavourable to mankind from this ſtudy; eſpecially if we read hiſtories of all kinds, and pay the attention, which it merits, to that part which contains the lives of wiſe and good men. To this we ſhould add, a careful obſervation of the characters of men, as they fall under our notice in the world; which will contribute to remove this prejudice.

THIS courſe of reading, and theſe obſervations, will bring to our view, indeed, many inſtances of wickedneſs; and we ſhall ſee the lawleſs paſſions of men breaking out into enormities, which will excite our keeneſt indignation. On theſe occaſions, the ſevereſt reflections on men and their manners, fall from the pen of the ſatyriſt; and the moſt tragical exclamations on the degeneracy of the preſent times, eſcape the

the rigid cenſurer of his cotemporaries. Here the reviler of human nature triumphs in the confirmation of his favourite doctrine, that "all our nature is ſin;" and with an air of exultation, calls upon you to obſerve the exceſſes, into which the unreſtrained paſſions of men hurry them. Conſider, however, if it be only for a moment, whence it is that we are ſo much ſhocked with the more heinous inſtances of vice which we behold: it is becauſe they are not more common. Did they happen daily, every where, they would ceaſe to awaken ſuch bitter invectives: ſo that this rather ſpeaks in favour of human nature, than againſt it. "How "juſtly," ſays one, "might we exclaim "againſt the univerſal wickedneſs of "mankind, were crimes as common "as it is to ſee men contracting alli-"ances and friendſhips, forming and "preſerving ſocieties, practiſing juſ-"tice and equity, giving and return-

" ing benefits, providing with honeſt
" induſtry for their families and friends,
" exerciſing commendable arts, and
" working towards a common good!"
So eaſy is it for a candid inquirer to examine the actions of men, without becoming uncharitable; and to collect ſuch opinions from the inquiry, as will raiſe his ideas of human nature, and of the great Being, from whom it is derived.

But let the opinions we form of men in conſequence of theſe reſearches be what they will; they will, however, be favourable to the notion of a ſimilar order in the moral, to that in the natural world, and ſo ſtrengthen the arguments for the divine providence and government. If they lead to honourable ideas of human nature, and teach us to regard the creature man as eminently diſtinguiſhed by his intellectual and moral powers; how obvious will be

be the concluſion, that the Being from whom he proceeds muſt be poſſeſſed, at leaſt, of the excellencies which he has communicated! If, on the contrary, we reſt in the opinion, that men are univerſally ſelfiſh; that they ſcruple no wickedneſs, by which they may accompliſh their low purpoſes; that they are continually deceiving, ſupplanting, betraying each other; that the ſemblance of attachment amongſt them is wholly falſe, and means only their own intereſt; that the end of all their intercourſe in ſociety is, mutually to overreach, plunder, and deſtroy: let the features of the picture be heightened, till the ſhocking appellation, "half brute, half devil," ſhall aptly apply to it; ſtill, whilſt it is confeſſed that ſuch creatures do ſubſiſt in ſociety, His ſurpaſſing ſkill muſt be acknowledged, which prevents the ruin which threatens, from entering and over-whelming this part of his creation.

I WAS far from intending ſo particular a detail, when I entered on this part of the ſubject; but if it afford the Chriſtian preacher any aſſiſtance in the religious ſtudy of nature, or only hint to him the many advantages with which it will be attended, ſo as to engage his early and renewed application, I ſhall think my labour well beſtowed.

§. IV.

IT eaſily appears, from what has been ſaid, that the inquiry into the doctrines of natural religion, will call up our attention to thoſe which are revealed. Here the ſame accurate ſtudy of the word of God will be neceſſary, as, in the former inſtance, of his works. How deſirable it is, that a perſon enter upon, and proſecute, theſe ſtudies with a ſerious, but manly ſpirit; with a humble opinion of himſelf; and at the ſame time, with a full determination to ſubmit to no man's authority in matters

ters of religion, it is unneceſſary to ſay. We cannot be thought, indeed, to have due reſpect for the ſacred cauſe of religious truth, unleſs we eſpouſe it with this liberal, generous ſpirit. What a pitiful advocate for the truth will he be thought, who ſearches after, or profeſſes it, with the diſpiriting fear of offending, or with the ſordid deſire of pleaſing, this or that man? He can have little proſpect of acquiring the invaluable treaſure, who can never loſe ſight for a moment of a certain ſet of opinions, to which he has already, or muſt preſently, declare his aſſent. To indulge this ſpirit muſt, on all ſubjects, be prejudicial to the cauſe of truth; but it ſtrikes the ſerious mind no where ſo forcibly as in the caſe of divine revelation.

We are chargeable with equal meanneſs, in admitting the interference of human authority on any points, on which God appears to have ſpoken,

either with his own voice in his works, or by that of men, whom he has commiſſioned to declare his will. But revealed truths have ſo much intereſted the paſſions, and intereſts of men; and the powers of this world have thought themſelves ſo much at liberty to give their ſanction, to encourage or oppoſe certain opinions with regard to them; that the caution, not to fear the perſon of man, where the intereſts of truth were at ſtake, appeared peculiarly ſeaſonable in this part of my diſcourſe.

It will appear, from what has been ſaid, that I mean not to ſhelter myſelf under the wings of any religious eſtabliſhment. I am very ſenſible how large, and how formidable a body will be drawn up againſt me, on my chuſing this ground; but he is unworthy of the honourable character of an advocate of religious truth, who fears any numbers, or any ſtrength which may be enliſted againſt it.

BUT, to take a fair eſtimate of the ſtrength of the oppoſite party: the arguments of thoſe, who have drawn up a ſet of articles, which all the members of their reſpective communities, or their miniſters alone, are obliged to ſubſcribe, give me little concern. They muſt have confined themſelves to very few particulars, or have drawn them up with uncommon attention, if it be not eaſy to ſhew, that they have admitted doctrines not ſufficiently certain and important; or excluded ſuch as have an equal right to a place there with thoſe which have been introduced; or have not expreſſed themſelves with ſufficient preciſion, or ſufficient latitude, in the articles which they propoſe to the acceptance of their Chriſtian brethren. For ſhould it appear, that the definitions are either too ſtrict, or too lax; that the propoſitions are too few, or too many; the whole muſt fall to the ground, as inſufficient

for the purpoſe, for which it was intended.

It is more difficult to ſpeak properly to thoſe of a more philoſophical turn, who, without offering any creed, aſſert, that the civil magiſtrate has a right to know the opinions of every member of the community, and eſpecially of ſuch as profeſs to inſtruct others in religion; and that no ſect has any juſt reaſon to expect his countenance or protection, without ſatisfying him, that its opinions may be ſafely tolerated. "The governor in every ſociety," ſay they, "has a right to reſtrain thoſe, "who expoſe poiſons to ſale, under the "name of wholeſome medicines: and "ſhall he ſuffer thoſe doctrines to be "propagated, which would infect the "minds of his ſubjects, and render "them averſe or indifferent to the of-"fices of ſocial life?"—It is our duty then, it ſhould ſeem, to purſue our philo-

philoſophical and religious inquiries with ſpirit and diligence, with a hearty love to the truth, and a high veneration for the God of truth; but withal to take care how we receive any notions, which the magiſtrate is not inclined, or which good policy will not allow him, to tolerate.—With what ſpirit, and with what ſucceſs, we ſhall ſearch after the truth on this plan, it is not difficult to divine.

THERE are ſome perſons, however, who ſeem to think themſelves very liberal in the conceſſion, when they ſay, that they have no objection to the moſt unreſtrained inquiries, and to all that liberty of opinion, which follows from them; but they think there ſhould not be the ſame licence of profeſſion, eſpecially where the ſafety of the community, or the particular ſyſtem which it countenances, is in queſtion.

WHO does not ſee, of how extraordinary a nature the favour is, which is here granted? We have the indulgence to think for ourſelves, which no human power can reſtrain; but we muſt not declare our opinions. But what if they be of ſuch a nature, that we cannot keep them to ourſelves, without incurring the guilt of diſſimulation? Or ſuppoſe it to be our deliberate judgment, that it is our duty to declare them?

THE queſtion will ſtill return, Is it right to oppoſe thoſe doctrines, in which the ſociety in general are agreed, and which they acknowledge to be ſacred? This cannot be made a queſtion, by thoſe who acknowledge the difference between truth and error, and allowing the fallibility of the human judgment, are perſuaded, that truth ought in every caſe to prevail over error; which it will hardly do, if every propoſition whatever be

be not ſubmitted to a free and impartial examination.

IT will ſtill be ſaid, that ſome opinions are favourable, others are prejudicial to ſociety; and that for the ſame reaſon that the former are encouraged, the other ſhould be prohibited. This, I acknowledge, is the moſt formidable objection to an univerſal toleration, and deſerves the moſt attentive conſideration. It ſhould be remembered, however, that the particulars, to which it will fairly apply, are not very numerous; for though there is not perhaps any moral or religious truth, which is not important, when conſidered in its connexion with others; or any error which will not, if purſued through all its conſequences, be of evil tendency; yet there are many opinions which, taken by themſelves, have little or no influence on the actions of thoſe who receive them; and therefore, as far as ſociety

is

is concerned, muſt be regarded as in a great meaſure indifferent: and the greateſt part of the diſputes which have in all ages engaged the attention of mankind have turned on ſubjects of this ſort.

THOSE truths which have a direct and immediate influence on the actions of men, beſides that they are few, are ſurrounded with ſuch a light, as to ſtrike every eye that beholds them; and the oppoſite errors are no ſooner ſeen, than they are diſcovered to be ſuch. There is little occaſion for any argumentative diſcuſſion in this buſineſs. The evidence for theſe doctrines is ſo ſtrong in itſelf, that ſcarcely any thing can increaſe it; and there is little danger of their receiving any injury from the arts which may be employed againſt them. In the houſe of their friends, indeed, they may be hurt, and no where elſe. There is at leaſt ſome danger in the officious

officious care which they take to ſhield them from every attack, leſt their anxiety ſhould create a ſuſpicion, that theſe truths have not all the certainty which is attributed to them. The very attempt to ſecure the reception of them by worldly advantages, or to ſhelter them from inquiry by pains, penalties, or any worldly inconveniences whatever to thoſe who call them in queſtion, can have no other good effect, than to weaken the foundation on which they are eſtabliſhed.

If, after all, there ſhould be perſons who carry their doubts ſo far, as to queſtion all moral obligations, how are we to proceed with them? in what religious or civil employment are they fit to be truſted? To this it is obvious to reply, that perſons may have their doubts in their cloſets, and purſue their ſpeculations ſo far as to undermine all principles whatever, who, when they come

come into the world, ſpeak and act like other people. But ſhould it indeed be their ſettled opinion, that truth and juſtice, with the other virtues, had no claim to our approbation; and that it was a matter of indifference, whether they made theſe or their oppoſites the rule of their conduct; where could be the advantage of teſts and articles to thoſe, who could have no ſcruple of ſubmitting to any which would anſwer their purpoſe?

If this reaſoning be admitted, it will follow, that we ſhould purſue our inquiries into the doctrines of Scripture, as well as on every other religious ſubject, with an entire freedom; acknowledging no power in any man, in any body of men, to preſcribe what we are to believe, or what we are to reject. With a full perſuaſion of the reaſonableneſs of this free inquiry, I recommend it to the Chriſtian preacher, ever to conduct his ſtudies with this ſpirit.

§. V.

IT will not, however, be allowed, that this determination to judge for himſelf, will render a man raſh and precipitate in his judgments; or prevent his making a proper uſe of the obſervations and inquiries of thoſe, who have formerly walked in the ſame paths. His opinions may be the reſult of an impartial examination, without his being in the leaſt chargeable with a conceited opinion of his own underſtanding. He may be very ſenſible of the many cauſes of error, of the neceſſity of ſuſpenſe and a cautious aſſent, and of the care with which every argument ſhould be weighed; and reſolve, after all, to follow the dictates of his own mind. He may be very willing to take all the aſſiſtance, which the converſation and writings of others can afford him, without reſigning himſelf to their direction, and blindly following their guidance.

BUT

BUT whatever regard he may pay to his own deciſions, every wiſe man will, in matters of revelation, be determined by the unerring rule of faith, the divine word. To aſcertain this, he will have recourſe to the predictions which are contained, and the miracles which are related, in the Holy Scriptures; and as far as both, or either, appear to be credible, will acknowledge them ſufficient to eſtabliſh the interpoſition of Heaven. It is remarkable, that the argument from prophecy, and that from miracles, have been employed to invalidate each other, according as the one or the other has been the favourite ſtudy of a particular author; but the conſiſtent friend of revealed religion will be attentive to both, and make his beſt advantage of the helps, which they jointly afford, to eſtabliſh the authority of the ſacred books. What theſe are, and with what regard they ſhould be received, will be his next inquiry.

And

And whatever difficulty there may be in determining the canonical books of the Old and New Teſtament, and their ſufficiency to eſtabliſh a particular ſyſtem of truths; it muſt be acknowledged, that there is in each revelation one leading, important truth, which appears every where, and which all the parts concur to eſtabliſh. The chief point in the Jewiſh religion is, the exiſtence of the one great Being, who made and governs the world; and in the Chriſtian, a future ſtate of righteous retribution. The books which contain theſe truths, will doubtleſs command the attention of all wiſe men into whoſe hands they fall, and they will be deſirous of making themſelves maſters of all the knowledge which they contain; but to learn their leading deſign is no ſmall acquiſition; and the firm belief of theſe two doctrines, muſt have a mighty influence to add to the ſtrength and excellence of the human mind.

THE religious inquiries, which are conducted on this plan, will be particularly agreeable, and uſeful. The truth of God, whether contained in the book of nature, or in the volume of his word, never appears ſo pleaſing, as when viewed in the light in which it is placed, as profitable for inſtruction in righteouſneſs. This is likewiſe a moſt eligible way of conſidering it, as it will contribute to take off the attention from the leſs uſeful parts, and confine the eye to the intereſting doctrines, which are the ſtrength and joy of thoſe who receive them. I would in particular recommend this method of ſtudying religion, and of deducing its truths, to the Chriſtian preacher, in order to his applying them, firſt to the improvement of his own heart, and then to the benefit of thoſe who hear. Thus will he fulfil the end of his miniſtry, according to the noble deſcription of its deſign, "to ſave himſelf," and "thoſe who hear him."

IT is impoſſible that, in the courſe of a regular education for the Chriſtian miniſtry, this branch of ſtudy can be omitted: in many ſchools of learning, it juſtly makes a principal part of it. To enter on the office without this previous preparation, is as abſurd as it would be for a man to commence a judge or advocate, without any knowledge of the laws, on which his determinations or reaſonings are founded; or to become a profeſſor of any other art or ſcience, without having any knowledge of its principles. But it is not enough, that the preacher examine this ſubject previous to his entrance on the office. It is a ſtudy, to which he ſhould return from time to time; and which he ſhould purſue, without ſuffering any long interruption, to the end of his life. Beſides the uſe of this knowledge to the preacher, to improve his ideas of religion, and to enable him to enrich his public diſcourſes with

thoſe illuſtrations of them which it affords; I will venture to promiſe him, that he will always return to it with freſh pleaſure. For as, in the courſe of his public ſervices, he will be more likely to conſider the doctrine of revelation in its practical deſign and tendency, he will have an ever-growing conviction of the utility of the ſcheme, and an increaſing pleaſure in every review of it. In this view, the word of God, like his works, will continually furniſh freſh matter for inquiry, and contribute "to make the man of God perfect." To this inquiry, and the uſes to which it is applied, our Saviour may probably refer, when he ſays, that "every ſcribe inſtructed unto the king-"dom of heaven, is like a houſeholder "who bringeth out of his treaſure "things new and old."

§. VI.

§. VI.

THIS general view of the nature and deſign of revealed religion, will be of admirable uſe to the Chriſtian preacher. He will not, however, reſt here; but will be ſtudious to inform himſelf of the contents of all the books, which ſound criticiſm ſhall determine to make a part of the original revelation. The writings, which will offer themſelves to this ſcrutiny, are of different kinds; and will gain ſuch a reception, as the particulars, which are contained in them, ſhall appear to merit. Some of them are merely hiſtorical, and have the appearance of being collections from certain traditions, records, or annals of facts, which were generally received for true and authentic, in the places where they were preſerved. This ſeems to be the character of moſt of the hiſtorical books of the Old Teſtament. Theſe hiſtories, in common with all

others, preſent us with objects of approbation and cenſure, in the characters which are delineated. Some are drawn, which are highly excellent; others, exceedingly faulty; and all of a mixed nature: ſo that the beſt of them, if there are many particulars in them to command our admiration and eſteem, are not free from thoſe defects, which call for the candid indulgence of the reader. Great pains have been taken, by a certain claſs of writers, to blacken theſe characters, eſpecially ſuch as the hiſtorians have held forth as the objects of admiration; and on this account, the friends of revelation have ſhewn a determination to vindicate them altogether, and to repreſent them as almoſt faultleſs. But however they may be worthy of blame, who detract from the real merit of good men, or even ſo much as withhold the praiſe, to which their virtue entitles them; it cannot ſurely be neceſſary to throw a varniſh over

over the faults, or wholly to conceal the imperfections, to which all human characters are liable. The praiſes beſtowed on Abraham, as the friend of God, or on David, as the man after God's own heart, by the writers of their lives, are not perhaps rightly underſtood by us. The expreſſions of perfect, upright, and the like, which are applied to others, are juſtly interpreted as deſcriptions of their general character, and not as referring to every action and incident of their lives. It may be allowed too, without injury to the cauſe of religion, that, in ſome inſtances, the hiſtorians were poſſibly too laviſh in their praiſes; that they had an over-fond attachment to the names of their countrymen, and eſpecially of their illuſtrious anceſtors; and from a veneration for their memory, as the friends and advocates of religious truth, were not willing to allow any thing faulty or exceptionable in their charac-

ters. But whatever the ſentiments of others be, it is our part to give its deſerved praiſe to every good action, and with the ſtricteſt impartiality to mark every thing of a contrary nature. The preacher, in particular, when he refers to theſe hiſtories in his public diſcourſes, will be careful to hold forth to the eſteem and admiration of his hearers, thoſe qualities alone which are truly excellent; and to direct their cenſure to every thing, which they ought to avoid.

THIS uſe, the hiſtory, which I am conſidering, has in common with almoſt every other; but it has an excellency, which is perhaps peculiar to itſelf. The pen of the common hiſtorian is uſually employed to give us high notions of men, to diſplay the abilities of princes, the wiſdom of legiſlators, and the magnanimity and courage of heroes; but the hiſtory before us has a far different object.

object. It repreſents governors and warriors as raiſed up by the providence of God, to accompliſh his purpoſes, and to bleſs or to puniſh mankind agreeably to his will, and under his direction and influence. Thus it coincides with what has juſt been mentioned as the leading deſign of the Jewiſh revelation, to eſtabliſh the divine exiſtence and government.

AFTER the hiſtorical, the prophetical books of the Old Teſtament will naturally call up the reader's attention. The faithful hiſtorian relates what has happened; the true prophet foretells what ſhall come to paſs in ſome future period of time; and both of them agree, in taking ſuch a portion of the courſe and order of events, as ſhall be agreeable to their particular purpoſe. To qualify a perſon for the writing of hiſtory, all that is neceſſary is, that he have an accurate knowledge of his ſubject,

ject, and that he have the ſkill to diſpoſe his materials, ſo as to convey a full and clear idea of it. If, with theſe qualifications, it be his deſign to give a true relation of facts, nothing eſſential to the character ſeems to be wanting. But in order to give an account of what is concealed in the womb of time, if it reſt on any higher authority than mere conjecture, there are other endowments neceſſary, and thoſe ſuch as the unaſſiſted powers of the human mind cannot ſupply.

VARIOUS are the claims which have been made to the knowledge of futurity, in the different ages of the world. Some of them carry their own confutation in the very face of them; others, though not ſo evidently falſe, are attended with ſuſpicious circumſtances; and there are predictions, which have ſo many of the appearances of truth, as to merit the attention and inquiry of the ſober critic.

SUCH

SUCH future events as depend on the volitions of men, cannot be foreknown without a perfect knowledge of the opinions and diſpoſitions of the beings concerned in the production of them. Now there is no ſenſe or faculty, by which one man can gain any immediate knowledge of the heart of another, and all the ſigns which lead to the diſcovery of what paſſes in it, are too uncertain to be depended upon; for whether he endeavour to collect the ſentiments of any one from his countenance, his words, or his actions—and I know of nothing elſe which will afford him the leaſt light in the inquiry—it is obvious he may be deceived by any of them, or by all together. If therefore we meet with a relation of what is to happen in any future time, conſiſting of ſuch particulars as imply ſomething more than a bare conjecture, and either ſee ourſelves, or have a credible account from others of the facts by which it is

verified,

verified, we are certain, that the relater muſt have derived his knowledge of them from a Being, who can diſcover the actions of men in their cauſes, and has an exact knowledge of the inward principles of the human mind, and of their operations and conſequences.

WHAT will happen in the material world, may be foreſeen by one who is acquainted with the laws of matter and motion; and no prediction, in ſubjects of this nature, will give any preſumption of ſupernatural knowledge, except ſuch alone as relate a foreſeen violation of the regular courſe of events, which, it is ſuppoſed, will continue, till it pleaſe the Author of it to interpoſe, in an extraordinary manner, for its alteration. But he who foretels the voluntary actions of men, or any events which are connected with, or dependent upon them, muſt have other means of information than his own inquiries, or any human aſſiſtance, can afford him.

THAT

THAT the ſcriptures of the Old and New Teſtament contain ſuch predictions, is generally allowed. Of theſe, ſome received their accompliſhment preſently after they were delivered; their uſe was conſequently confined to one particular time: others were not fulfilled till many years and ages had elapſed; and therefore all who can be perſuaded, that the prophecy really anſwers to the event, and has the antiquity to which it pretends, muſt be convinced of the extraordinary interpoſition of Heaven: others reach to our own times, and we perceive the growing evidence which they give to the truth of divine revelation: and there are, beſides theſe, ſuch as appear to relate to periods of time which are ſtill future; with which we have little concern, but to obſerve the facts which riſe up to verify them, and to tranſmit them, with all the purity we are able, to the ſucceeding generation.

I AM

I AM well aware, to what laborious and difficult inveſtigations this inquiry will lead. The language of prophecy is uſually obſcure; it requires much knowledge and attention to apply it, in every inſtance, to the facts to which it relates. Let thoſe, who wiſh to diſcredit predictions altogether, make their own uſe of theſe conceſſions: the truth ought not to be denied or concealed; and no cauſe is worth ſupporting, which needs the aid of diſingenuity. An author is not always thrown aſide, becauſe he is obſcure; or a ſubject of inquiry neglected, on account of the knowledge and learning which are neceſſary, to become maſters of it. The only queſtions proper to be aſked, are, Is there any ſuch difficulty in the matter, as to make it impoſſible to be underſtood? And will the advantages of the acquiſition, compenſate for the labour which it requires? If it be allowed, with regard to any branch of ſcience,

ſcience, that it is a worthy object of ſtudy, and that we have faculties to maſter the difficulties which attend it; all that remains is, that we apply to it with all the ardour and attention, which our ſituation will admit.

To apply this to the caſe before us; whether the language of the ancient prophets be intelligible or not, and how far the knowledge neceſſary to diſcern the accompliſhment of them is attainable, can be determined by thoſe alone, who have made a faithful and diligent inquiry. Some of them appear to be attended with fewer, others with more difficulties; the accompliſhment of ſome is ſo evident, as to force conviction on the mind of almoſt every inquirer; and with others it may remain a doubt, after all the labour beſtowed upon them, whether or no the events, to which they refer, are or can be produced.

As

As to the uſes of the ſubject, they are ſuch as amply to reward the application of the ſerious ſtudent. To the preacher in particular it will be highly uſeful, not only as it confirms the truth of revelation, but as it affords the nobleſt views of the divine knowledge and government; ſhewing that all the events of time are comprehended in one underſtanding, and directed by one will, ſo as to accompliſh the ſame great purpoſe.

THUS much will eaſily offer itſelf to the view of every one, who applies to this ſtudy: and it may with truth be added, for the encouragement of thoſe who wiſh to proſecute the inquiry, that moſt of the writers who have ſtudied ſcripture prophecies, with the view of pointing out ſuch as have received their accompliſhment, have been ſucceſsful. Thoſe, indeed, who have taken upon them to fix the period of ſuch as are

ſtill

ſtill future, and to foretell from them when the events to which they refer ſhall take place, have only expoſed their own ignorance and preſumption; but, in the humbler province of interpreters, they have generally thrown light on thoſe who have gone before them, and held it up to their ſucceſſors. It may be fairly preſumed, therefore, that every age will make ſome advances on the preceding in this as in other branches of uſeful knowledge, till the diſcoveries which God has made ſhall all be underſtood in the future eternal world, to which they evidently direct our attention. In this view, every prediction, which has received or ſhall receive a clear accompliſhment, ſtrengthens our faith in him, who is the author of eternal ſalvation to all his faithful ſervants.*

THE

* IT is worthy of our attention, that the moſt particular deſcription of the future happineſs of the righteous is contained in the book of the Revelation of John.

THE other parts of the Old Teſtament, being either devotional or moral, will command the attention of the reader, in proportion to his reliſh for either of theſe kinds of compoſition. But the preacher will ſtudy them, as other works on ſuch ſubjects, to improve his own ſtock of ideas, and ſo to enable him to enrich his diſcourſes with quotations from them, or alluſions to them, or to repreſent, in his own words, the obſervations and directions which they contain.

Had it been given in one of the hiſtorical books, or in any other part of Scripture, it would doubtleſs have had its uſe; but it can appear no where with ſo much propriety, or be attended with ſuch advantage, as in its connexion with a ſeries of prophecies, which are generally underſtood to have received a gradual accompliſhment from the time when they were written to the preſent day. For as Lowman juſtly obſerves (*Paraphraſe and Notes on the Revelation of John*, p. 257) "An obſervation of the faithful and punctual accompliſhment of the former parts of this prophecy, in times paſt, for ſeveral hundreds of years, ſerves much to confirm our faith and hope, in as punctual and faithful performance of what remains."

§. VII.

§. VII.

THE books of the New Teſtament will be allowed to contain facts ſtill more intereſting, than thoſe which have been conſidered. We have here the hiſtory of Jeſus Chriſt, and of the firſt publication of his religion; a hiſtory extremely curious in itſelf, and eſpecially in its conſequences. Whoever conſiders the change of opinions and cuſtoms, which the Chriſtian religion effected, wherever it took place, muſt regard its eſtabliſhment amongſt any people, as the moſt extraordinary event in their hiſtory. But if we further reflect, how obſcure the country was, in which it firſt appeared; who the miſſionaries were, by whom it was carried from thence into other parts of the world; and what was the ſucceſs which crowned their miſſion; we ſhall readily acknowledge, that the annals of

the world do not afford a greater and more aſtoniſhing revolution. The opinions of a few fiſhermen, who are without any of the advantages of learning, wealth or power, to recommend them, who are deſpiſed and perſecuted at home, and unknown abroad, are delivered firſt of all to their own countrymen, and then to their neighbours; and obtain a ſignal triumph, firſt over the prejudices of the common people, and afterwards over all the attempts which the greateſt and moſt learned men in the world could form againſt them, and that without any addreſs to the prevailing inclinations or paſſions of mankind. Trace theſe opinions in their progreſs from Paleſtine into the neighbouring parts of Aſia, Africa, and Europe, and, in proceſs of time, into the remoteſt diſtricts of the Roman empire; view them in their paſſage acroſs the vaſt Atlantic to the New World; caſt your eyes Eaſt, Weſt, North

North and South, and compute, as well as you are able, the extent of country, over which they have ſpread; and meaſure in your mind the period of eighteen centuries, which they have now nearly reached; and you will own, that ſuch a vaſt increaſe from ſo ſmall a beginning, ſhould awaken the curioſity, and engage the attentive obſervation and inquiry of all the learned.

THE general idea of the Goſpel-hiſtory is briefly this; that Jeſus Chriſt, after a public miniſtry of a very ſhort duration in the land of Judea—it is not certain that it continued two years, it is very generally allowed that it did not reach to the end of the fourth year—was apprehended, tried as a criminal, and put to death; that early on the third day, he aroſe from the dead, converſed with his diſciples for forty days, and then aſcended into heaven in their ſight, and thus concluded his abode on earth.

THE apoſtles of Chriſt were appointed to be the witneſſes of this great fact, the reſurrection of their Maſter, and to encourage all his followers in the expectation of riſing from the dead, in order to ſhare his glory and happineſs. The reſurrection of our Saviour eſtabliſhes his authority as a divine teacher or meſſenger; and, in particular, gives a perfect credibility to every thing which he has taught reſpecting the preſent privileges, and eſpecially the future happineſs of all the righteous.

THE reſt of the hiſtory relates to the miniſtry of the apoſtles, firſt in the Jewiſh, and afterwards in the Heathen world; and is the opening of the vaſt deſign for the propagation of the Goſpel, which has juſt been conſidered.

THE miracles and prophecies of the New Teſtament, do not require any particular conſideration in this diſcourſe, after

after what has been already ſaid on thoſe of the Old.

THE remaining books are the epiſtles, which were addreſſed by the apoſtles, either to particular perſons or churches; or which, from their not having any ſuch deſignation, were called catholic or univerſal.

THE primary intention of theſe letters doubtleſs was, to direct and encourage the perſons to whom they were ſent, or to aſſiſt the Chriſtian world in general, in the particular age, in which the writers of them lived. But they are conſidered as containing alſo authoritative deciſions on many points, which concern all perſons and ages. How far this repreſentation is agreeable to the contents and deſign of theſe writings, it doubtleſs behoves us very ſeriouſly to conſider.

THAT the apoſtles of Chriſt were unexceptionable witneſſes to ſuch facts as fell under their own obſervation, cannot be queſtioned, without ſhaking the credit of all ancient hiſtory; that they actually underſtood the facts which they were appointed to atteſt, and knew how to draw juſt concluſions from them, may without difficulty be allowed; and that they deſerve very high regard, in every thing which they have delivered with reſpect to the general doctrine of Chriſt, the conſtitution of Chriſtian churches, and the like. But that every thing which they ſaid at all times, in all places, and on all occaſions, was dictated by the holy ſpirit of God; and that the ſubjects themſelves, and the words by which they were expreſſed, were in an extraordinary manner ſuggeſted to their minds, as ſome appear to have thought, cannot eaſily be believed. Such compoſitions would be a treaſure too valuable

to

to be truſted in the hands of weak mortals. Or if the mercy of God, which knows no bounds, ſhould incline him to favour mankind with ſo matchleſs a work, we can never ſuppoſe he would ſuffer it to be tranſmitted from one to another, in the ſame way with other books. Who can believe that it would be left in ſuch a ſtate, as to admit of corruption or alteration, which we know to have taken place, in a greater or leſs degree, in every tranſcript which has been made of it? This has been the caſe, where the ſacred books have been only tranſcribed in the language in which they were written; and every one ſees, that they are more liable to ſuch injuries, when they are tranſlated into other languages. It is well known, that Chriſtians have in every age diſputed with each other, whether or no certain books, or ſuch and ſuch particular parts of them, ſhould be admitted into the ſacred canon;

canon: now there is no one almoſt, who will not be ſhocked with the thought, that a book ſhould be written, as it were, with the finger of God himſelf, and have no ſuch marks of its high original, as to diſtinguiſh it from the work of a fallible, ſhort-ſighted mortal.

MANY other arguments might be urged againſt ſuch high notions of inſpiration; but it is leſs neceſſary to enlarge here, as moſt in the preſent day, who write on this ſubject, content themſelves with aſſerting a lower degree of it. It ſeems to be the general opinion, that the minds of the apoſtles were in an extraordinary degree enlightened with the knowledge of divine truth; but that they delivered it to others in their own words, as their abilities ſeverally directed them, and as their acquaintance with the language, which they choſe, admitted. But to this

this they add, that they were under ſuch an extraordinary ſuperintendance, as to preſerve them from error on whatever ſubjects they declared their opinions, and to make their diſcourſes and writings the infallible guides of all ſucceeding ages.

I AM very ſenſible of the offence which it will give to many Chriſtians, to have this opinion called in queſtion. But the concern of every man, and eſpecially of the ſacred preacher, the friend and advocate of divine knowledge ſhould be, what is the truth, indifferent whom it will pleaſe, and whom it will offend. Now it muſt be confeſſed, that the character under which the apoſtles, and others employed in communicating the Chriſtian doctrine, appeared in the earlieſt ages, is different from what has been juſt mentioned. They appear to have conſidered themſelves,

ſelves, and to have been conſidered by their diſciples, not as deciſive judges in the church of Chriſt, but as wiſe, diligent, and faithful interpreters of his will, as far as it had been delivered to them. How elſe ſhall we account for the accuſation brought againſt Peter, becauſe he had viſited Cornelius, and preached the doctrines of the Chriſtian religion to him and his friends, and for the defence which he made; or for the conduct which Paul and his companions obſerved with regard to the converts from amongſt the Gentiles, and the journey which he and Silas took, in order to ſtop the mouths of their accuſers by the determination of the brethren at Jeruſalem; or for the differences in opinion and practice, which ſubſiſted among the apoſtles themſelves? There are many other facts in the hiſtory of the New Teſtament, and paſſages in the epiſtles, which

which ſpeak the ſame language; but I leave them to the obſervation of the diligent, attentive reader.

THE leading idea of the office of the firſt preachers of the Chriſtian religion, which they give themſelves, is, that they were witneſſes of the life and character of Jeſus. They were appointed, as has been ſaid already, to give their faithful teſtimony to what they had either ſeen or heard. Their hiſtories of the miniſtry of Chriſt, though they have a general conſiſtence, yet differ from each other in circumſtances of ſmaller importance. The great leading facts have the ſupport of their united voice; but it is ſcarcely poſſible to name an incidental one, which they have all of them related.

THESE facts, with the eaſy obvious concluſions which they drew from them, were the chief ſubjects of the diſcourſes,

diſcourſes, which the apoſtles of Chriſt delivered to the world. The truth of the facts, to which they gave their teſtimony, cannot with any appearance of reaſon be called in queſtion; nor is there any room to ſuſpect the juſtneſs of the inferences which they drew from them. The general doctrines which their genuine works contain, may be depended upon as true, and have been ever conſidered as ſuch by the friends of the Chriſtian religion: nor is there any room to charge them with error on thoſe points, which it was the buſineſs of their miſſion to eſtabliſh: but books have been delivered under the names of the apoſtles, which certainly were not theirs; and thoſe which they really wrote have undergone ſuch changes, that it is ſometimes difficult to determine what the true reading is. Theſe writings are ſubject to the ſame variations with all other books, the copies of which are equally multiplied;

but

but beſides theſe involuntary corruptions, the ſacred text has ſuffered by the inſertion of ſome paſſages which did not belong to it, by the omiſſion of others which did, and by alterations in what remained, in order to ſerve the purpoſes of thoſe, who hoped by ſuch arts to procure the eſtabliſhment of certain cuſtoms, or the reception of doctrines to which they had a fond attachment. There is not a ſingle copy of the Scriptures, I am perſuaded, which does not contain the leading doctrines of the Chriſtian religion, ſo as to be ſufficient for the inſtruction of thoſe who will give them an attentive peruſal: the general credit of revelation, therefore, is not affected by theſe variations in the tranſcripts of the books by which it is tranſmitted; but to ſuch an inſpiration as is ſuppoſed to extend to every line and word in the ſacred volume, it is an unanſwerable objection.

§. VIII.

§. VIII.

THE great deſign of theſe books, which were firſt collected for the uſe of Chriſtian churches, and are ſtill continued in them, ſeems to be this; to hold forth certain lights, which will enable thoſe who will fix their eyes upon them, to form ſuch a ſcheme of opinions and rules, as will be ſufficient to direct their faith and practice.

IF we read ſome accounts of theſe books, we ſhall be inclined to expect in them a compleat and ſyſtematical delineation of all the doctrines and duties of religion, drawn out in a regular manner, with all the order, dependence, and mutual connexion, which the moſt exact treatiſe could give them. If we look into the ſyſtems of divinity which are profeſſedly founded upon them, and obſerve the meta-

phyſical

phyſical ſubtilties with which they abound; the nice queſtions which they propoſe and reſolve; how exactly they explain the nature and properties of every being; and how familiarly they ſpeak concerning the eſſence and ſubſtance of the firſt great Cauſe, with all their curious detail of ſubſiſtences, perſons, and the like; we ſhall imagine the Bible to be the moſt abſtruſe, myſterious book that ever was written. How greatly they will be diſappointed, who take it into their hands with ſuch expectations, muſt be obvious to every one who has the ſmalleſt acquaintance with its contents.

I WOULD, however, recommend this ſacred volume to the diligent, attentive, and repeated peruſal of thoſe, who wiſh to have juſt opinions on the ſubject of religion, and to gain the beſt rules for the direction of their moral and religious conduct. But its true uſe appears

to have been miſtaken; for however particular paſſages may be cited from it, to determine the controverſies which have haraſſed the Chriſtian world, it may be preſumed, that it is not calculated for this purpoſe, from the different and oppoſite determinations, which have been made under its ſanction, on almoſt every debate, into which the contentious ſons of men have entered. It is nearly impoſſible to enumerate all the controverſies, which the buſy curioſity of learned and unlearned men have introduced. But whether they have turned on the decrees and foreknowledge of God, and their influence on the actions of men; on the nature of the human ſoul, and the diſtinction between it and the body; on its ſeparate exiſtence, before it enters, and after it leaves the body; on the rank of beings in which Jeſus Chriſt is to be placed, his pre-exiſtence, the ends of his death, and its influence on the acceptance and

future

future happineſs of the true penitent; on the nature, perſonality and offices of the Holy Spirit of God; or on whatever other ſubject of a like nature; the contending diſputants have almoſt conſtantly urged the authority of the ſacred writers, in ſupport of their oppoſite opinions, uſually with equal advantage on both ſides, or, to ſpeak a plain truth, with little or none on either.

HENCE ſome have been inclined to ſay, that any opinions whatever may be drawn from the ſacred Scripture, and, by the arts of ingenious men, ſupported under their authority. Thoſe who have wiſhed to ſhew the inſufficiency of the written word, without the aid of oral tradition, and of an infallible head to fix its meaning, have contemptuouſly called it a noſe of wax, which might be drawn into the ſervice of any cauſe: others, on what rational principles, or with what views, it is not ſo eaſy to

ſay, have ſpoken in the moſt degrading terms of the Scripture revelation, without the teaching of the Spirit to every individual, to lead him to the true interpretation of it.

THESE conceſſions have been greedily catched at, by the enemies of all revelation; and they have with great appearance of reaſon concluded from them, that a written diſcovery of the will of God is not merely inſufficient, but altogether uſeleſs. Thus do the leaders of the moſt oppoſite ſects, in their zeal for their reſpective peculiarities, come nearer to each other, than they themſelves could have imagined to be poſſible; and contend for their own diſtinguiſhing notions with an attachment, which undermines the foundation of all inſtituted religion.

BUT with regard to theſe opinions, and the proceedings of the controverſialiſts,

ſialiſts, which have ſo evidently ſerved to introduce and ſupport them; they have in a great meaſure ariſen from their miſtaking or neglecting the true uſe of the Scriptures. The original writers ſeldom mention the diſputed doctrines which have been ſo much agitated in almoſt every ſucceeding age: on many of them they obſerve the moſt profound ſilence, and it would be eaſy to ſhew, that ſuch paſſages of their works as have been urged for or againſt them, refer to a quite different matter; and where they do ſpeak on any of the higher ſubjects of religion, it is with that dignity of ſentiment, and ſimplicity of expreſſion, which, if imitated, would have prevented all controverſy about them.

THESE writings have a real and moſt important uſe in the deciſion of religious controverſies, as they have been called, though it has not always been

ſufficiently attended to; and that is, by ſhewing the utter inſignificance of the far greater part of them. What good end they have anſwered, it is extremely difficult to ſay; if they have ſharpened the wits of men, they have diverted their attention from more important ſtudies, with this ſingular infelicity in the caſe of diſputes in religion, that thoſe who have engaged in them, have thought themſelves the advocates of ſacred truth, at the ſame time that they were drawing off their own regard, and that of thoſe who would liſten to them, from its main end and purpoſe. A ſtill greater evil in writings of this ſort, is the unfriendly, yea the angry, violent paſſions, which they have awakened in the authors of them, and, in ſome degree, in thoſe alſo who have followed their ſeveral opinions.*

IT

* THE intelligent reader will perceive, that much more might have been ſaid on this ſubject; and that the

IT is impoſſible, indeed, to be always out of the hearing of theſe controverſies. They are often referred to by our beſt practical writers, and it is generally

the indignation excited by religious bigotry, and its numberleſs attendant evils, is purpoſely reſtrained: but the author of this diſcourſe cannot allow himſelf to paſs even this cenſure on the temper with which controverſies have been conducted, and the malignant paſſions which they have occaſioned, without mentioning the late friendly debate, in a ſeries of letters between Dr. Price and Dr. Prieſtley, occaſioned by the *Diſquiſitions* of the latter *on Matter and Spirit*, as a moſt pleaſing example of a contrary ſpirit. It does not fall within the deſign of this work, to point out the ſtrength or weakneſs of the reaſonings of either of theſe able writers; and a bare unſupported opinion of the ſuppoſed truth of either ſcheme, could not be of the leaſt ſignificance. But the freedom with which they have each of them purſued the opinion of the other into all its conſequences, the candour with which this freedom has been received, and the mutual expreſſions of friendſhip and eſteem which run through, and cloſe the correſpondence, merit the praiſes of all, and the imitation of ſuch as ſhall chuſe to enter into ſuch diſcuſſions; and mark it for one of the very few productions of the kind, which diſcover great zeal for particular opinions, and the higheſt candour for another who is equally zealous againſt them.

expected, that the Chriſtian preacher ſhould know ſomething of their reſpective merits; but to make them the ſubject of his whole ſtudy, appears to be a ſad miſpending of his precious hours; and beſides, that it will draw off his attention from more important inquiries, it will be apt to give him a fondneſs for controverſy, and to nouriſh thoſe paſſions, which will prove unfavourable to his own tranquillity, and to the peace and happineſs of ſociety. But however the ſtudy of religion may lead the Chriſtian preacher to theſe diſcuſſions, or whatever ſkill he may acquire in the deciſion of them, he ſhould be very cautious how he introduces them into his pulpit-diſcourſes, or ſuffers them to uſurp the place of the moral precepts, which with the noble and animating motives to the practice of them, which the general doctrines of religion ſupply, merit the particular attention of himſelf and his hearers.

COULD the great Author of our religion be conſulted in perſon on this ſubject, we ſhould have an unerring rule, by which to proceed. We ſhould have a ſure criterion by which to judge what doctrines merit our attention, what are too high for the human faculties in its preſent ſtate; and ſhould be authoriſed, it may be, in paſſing over many of them as unintereſting and frivolous. With the help of ſuch an inſtructor, we ſhould have a clear diſcernment of the truth on every queſtion of real importance; and ſhould know preciſely where we were to ſuſpend our inquiries, and to ſit down contented with a modeſt and unpretending ignorance.

BUT as this is a felicity, which we are not to expect in this world, it will be our wiſdom to ſubſtitute in its place the beſt expedient which our preſent condition affords, I mean the careful peruſal of the diſcourſes of Jeſus, which,

through

through the ſingular bleſſing of God, are handed down for our ſtudy and imitation. Here we find perpetual alluſions to the great doctrines of religion, and ſuch as ſhew that the ſpeaker had himſelf the nobleſt ideas on theſe ſubjects.

His doctrines are to be ſought in his own diſcourſes, and there only; nor ſhould we haſtily admit any thing as a part of his religious inſtitution, which is not delivered by ſome one of the evangeliſts. Were every other part of the New Teſtament loſt, except thoſe books which give us the life and diſcourſes of our Saviour, his ſyſtem of religion would ſtill be compleat, and there would be the ſame foundation, as there now is, for the faith and hope of his followers. Subſequent facts may be very inſtructive, and ſtrengthen the evidence of a divine interpoſition; and the writings of the earlier Chriſtians more

more eſpecially afford a very good help for underſtanding the doctrine of Chriſt; but his own diſcourſes alone, it ſhould ſeem, hold forth an authentic declaration of it. I would not be thought to undervalue the writings of the apoſtles of Chriſt; on the contrary, I eſteem them very highly, and wiſh to improve my ideas on religious ſubjects by the repeated peruſal of them; but in point of authority, they ſhould not be put upon a level with the dictates of their Maſter. His religion came entire and perfect from his own mouth; and this with an authority ſuperior to that of all other religious inſtructors.

He does not indeed enter into a particular detail, or minute explication of the doctrines of religion. This, it ſhould ſeem, was not ſo agreeable to the character of a preacher of righteouſneſs, in which he appears to ſtand with a ſingular and unparalleled dignity.

nity. But I will venture to ſay, that whoever will diligently ſtudy His doctrine, and particularly his parables, will eaſily derive from them thoſe lights, which will conduct him with pleaſure and ſatisfaction through every uſeful inquiry into the theory of religion, which he ſhall be inclined to make. Were I diſpoſed to enlarge, it would not be difficult to point out ſuch accounts of the righteouſneſs, goodneſs, mercy, and other perfections of God, either expreſsly given, or evidently referred to, as would lay a juſt foundation for every pious ſentiment; but I leave it to thoſe who are diſpoſed to this work, to collect for their own uſe, all the paſſages of this kind, and to purſue the hints which are given; and I am well perſuaded, they will not repent the labour. If indeed they expect any thing further from this ſacred word; and eſpecially if they ſeek a clue to guide them through the mazes, in which

which the buſy curioſity of men has involved the ſubject, and a determinate anſwer to the numberleſs queſtions, with which every ſide has been puzzled in its turn; they will find, that they have miſtaken its purpoſe. Every thing uſeful in religion, may be learned with peculiar advantage from this beſt of teachers; but matters of mere curioſity, and eſpecially of doubtful diſputation, have no place in his inſtitution.

WHAT concluſion now ſhall we draw from the ſilence which our Saviour obſerves, with regard to theſe ſpeculations? What but this; that we may ſafely neglect them altogether, and ſuffer thoſe who deal in them to ſink into the oblivion to which the preſent age ſeems diſpoſed to conſign them? May I be permitted to congratulate my cotemporaries on their wiſdom in this particular? I would do it with the higheſt pleaſure, could it with truth be

be ſaid, that the diſregard with which writings of this ſort are received, is to be attributed ſolely to a perſuaſion of their futility and inſignificance; and not to an indifference about every thing ſerious, which ſeems to be the characteriſtic of the times. If, at the ſame time that this thorny path is deſerted, the more open ones were frequented, and the ſcience of morals ſtudied in the ſame degree in which religious controverſies fall into diſrepute; it would reflect no ſmall honour on the age, in which the change was effected. For the ſame reaſon that idle debates ſhould be diſcarded, there ſhould be introduced in their room thoſe ſerious, manly ſtudies, which will ſerve to give an amiable, conſiſtent view of the theory of religion, and a juſt repreſentation of its high obligations.

But it is not by mere ſilence, that our Saviour diſcourages the vain ſpeculations

lations of his diſciples in matters of religion. It ſhould ſeem, as if he could not for a moment forget the deſign of his appearance in the world, or enter into any diſcourſe or any buſineſs which was foreign to it. When a certain man, therefore, came to him with the requeſt, that he would ſpeak to his brother to divide with him the inheritance which he poſſeſſed (part of which, as he pretended, was his right) Jeſus put off the affair with this ſhort reply, "*Who made me a judge or divider?*" "It does not fall within my province "to ſettle affairs of this nature." At another time, which is more to my preſent purpoſe, he was called upon to ſettle one of thoſe queſtions, which the idle curioſity of man has prompted him to make, concerning the number of thoſe who ſhould be ſaved. The inquiry was, "Are there few that ſhall be ſaved?" The perſon had probably in

in his eye, the curious determination * —" The Moſt High hath made this " world for many, but the world to " come for few; there be many created, " but few ſhall be ſaved;" and having obſerved the purity of our Saviour's doctrine, and the freedom with which he inveighed againſt the reigning vices of the age, expected to hear this extraordinary ſentence confirmed by his authority. But Jeſus, inſtead of making a direct reply, gives this excellent advice, " Strive to enter in at the ſtrait gate."

THE narrow, uncharitable temper which dictated this inquiry, did not paſs without reproof on the occaſion now referred to; for our Saviour having taken this opportunity to urge a hearty compliance with the doctrines of true religion, and a diligent concern to make a right improvement of them,

* 2 Eſdras viii. 1, 3.

reproves

reproves the temper which it breathed with the obſervation, that converts to the truth ſhould "come from the eaſt, "and from the weſt, and from the "north, and from the ſouth, and ſit "down together in the kingdom of "God." To this he adds, "and there "are laſt, which ſhall be firſt, and "firſt, which ſhall be laſt:" which may be conſidered as no obſcure intimation of this great truth; that the advantages and rewards of true virtue lie within the reach of all, and that the excellencies of ſome, whom human pride had adjudged unworthy of a place in the family of God, ſhall raiſe them to a diſtinction, which their haughty cenſurers are unable to reach.

In this excellent manner does Jeſus turn a converſation, which in its beginning had the moſt unpromiſing appearance, to the noble purpoſe of recommending moral virtue, and of aſ-

ſuring it of an equal recompenſe from the impartial goodneſs of the righteous Governor of the world. Other ſimilar inſtances of the care with which the Author of our religion leads off the minds of his diſciples from high and uprofitable ſpeculations, and fixes them down to ſome uſeful moral leſſon, might be eaſily produced; but they cannot fail of offering themſelves on the review of his hiſtory.

THE excellent morality of the Chriſtian ſcheme is then its principal glory. The life and death of Jeſus, the doctrines of forgiveneſs and immortality, all tend to the one great purpoſe, of improving the nature of man, and producing a higher reſemblance to the image after which it was formed. In other words, the deſign of our religion is to lead us to the offices of piety and charity; or to ſuggeſt and recommend to our obſervance the pureſt precepts of morality.

§. IX.

§. IX.

BUT we are not to look for a compleat ſyſtem of morals, any more than of doctrines, in the diſcourſes of Jeſus and his immediate followers. Nor is this any reflection on them; none at leaſt is intended; and no offence, it is hoped, will be taken at the aſſertion. A little attention beſtowed on the ſubject will perhaps convince us, that it is not poſſible to reduce the perfect morality of the New Teſtament to method, or to comprehend its obligations within the bounds of any ſyſtem of precepts.

WHERE there is no other deſign than the regulation of the external conduct, it will be no difficult matter to give all the requiſite rules, and to reduce them to writing. But this being a part only of what Chriſtianity intends, it is leſs

to be wondered at, if this be inſufficient for its purpoſe. The regulation of the heart, the government of the temper, the cultivation and exerciſe of the beſt and moſt amiable diſpoſitions, are its objects; and to theſe no written law can be adequate. It may be an eaſy matter to deſcribe the character which ſhould be maintained, and to point out the offices to which it directs; but a perfect enumeration of the particulars included in it, cannot be made in any human language.

It is preſcribed to us, for inſtance, to be grateful for the benefits which we have received from God or man; and a recital is made of the favours which have been ſhewn us, ſo as to produce a grateful diſpoſition. But can any one ever reckon up all the ways, in which gratitude ſhould expreſs itſelf? It is eaſy to ſay, Conſider what you are able to do to promote the intereſt

tereſt or the fame, the preſent or the future advantage of your benefactor; but to mention all the numberleſs attentions which a grateful heart will ſhew, to point out all the methods of ſerving and pleaſing which it will ſeek, is plainly impoſſible. Conſider, again, the more comprehenſive affections of the love of our neighbour, and the love of God; and they will appear to take a greater compaſs, and to include more particulars in them, than any words can expreſs.

THERE is a law more ancient, more venerable, more perfect, than the laws of Zaleucus, of Charondas, of Solon, or Minos; it is not indeed to be equalled by any written inſtitutions; it is, in a word, the law of God, and alone deſerves the character given it by a great king, that "it is perfect." It is written by the finger of God, not on tables of ſtone or braſs, but on the liv-

ing tables of the human heart. The language of other codes is, This thou ſhalt do, from this or this thou ſhalt abſtain. This enjoins it on every man to forbear every unjuſt, every unkind action, and to attend to every office of juſtice and charity; and refers it to his ingenuity alone to determine how far he is to proceed: rather indeed it ſhews him, that the acts of virtue which it requires are innumerable; and that the degree of it which he ſhould place before his eyes, as the object of his deſires and endeavours, cannot be defined. The man who lives by theſe rules, is one who ſtands ever prepared for ſuch pious and charitable actions, as he has it in his power to perform; who gives into no indulgences, allows of no appetites or paſſions which interfere with theſe ſacred obligations, and values and attends to every inſtrumental duty in proportion to its ſubſerviency to them.

IT is obvious, that every ſyſtem of morals, every religious inſtitution, is uſeful and excellent, only ſo far as it calls up the attention of mankind to theſe grand duties. In this reſpect, with what a diſtinguiſhing excellence does the Chriſtian religion offer itſelf to our view? The firſt lines of this maſter-ſcience are drawn by the inſtructions of Jeſus, and, eſpecially in the light which his example reflects upon them, with ſuch clearneſs and ſtrength, that whoſoever will give himſelf the trouble to trace them out, will find them a ſure and ſafe rule in all the varieties of human life. This appears to be a juſt view of the Chriſtian ſcheme of morals; and a method of conſidering it, which will be attended with many advantages.

THE eaſy reply which theſe obſervations will ſuggeſt, to moſt of the objections which have been made to this

inſtitution as a rule of life, deſerves our particular attention. It is well known, that both the conduct of Jeſus himſelf, and the rules which he gave for the uſe of others, have been freely cenſured.

WHILST he was upon earth, his behaviour was conſidered as too free for the character which he ſuſtained: he was, in conſequence of this, called a gluttonous man, a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and ſinners; and the injunctions which he laid his diſciples under, were repreſented as too lax for the profeſſors of ſo pure an inſtitution. The clear, able manner, in which he vindicated himſelf on theſe heads, is too well known to make it neceſſary to repeat his arguments.

IN later ages, his moral ſyſtem has been complained of, as too ſtrict and ſevere. In particular, his abſolute prohibition of the indulgence of the evil affections

affections of the heart, and his requiſition of the forgiveneſs of injuries in ſuch unlimited terms, have been urged as objections to the rule of duty, which his religion is ſuppoſed to contain. What ſort of perſons they appear to be, who object to theſe rules, or what would be the conſequence in ſocial life, if theſe reſtraints were taken off, I ſhall not ſtay to inquire. Common ſenſe will direct us to limit all ſuch particular commands, if neceſſary, by the great laws of juſtice and piety; and to obſerve them, as far as they conſiſt with the love of God and of man, which the precepts and example of Chriſt concur to recommend, muſt reflect the higheſt honour on human nature.

THIS, however, is not the only charge brought againſt the moral part of the Chriſtian ſcheme. Whilſt ſome have condemned it as too ſevere, others have repreſented it as materially deficient.

cient. It no where recommends, it is ſaid, either private friendſhip, or the love of our country, or the endearing, uſeful offices of theſe affections. The method which has been taken by ſome to get over this difficulty, is ſo curious, as to deſerve being mentioned, were it only to ſhew how far it is poſſible for men to proceed, in defence of the opinions which they have once adopted. The reſult of it is, that they are not virtues; that friendſhip is an amiable weakneſs, of which perſons of an affectionate temper are indeed ſuſceptible, and from which they may derive ſome private ſatisfactions, but that the great intereſts of mankind are little affected by it. Patriotiſm, however, cannot obtain even this commendation; but is conſidered rather as a crime, than an excellence. Muſt it be allowed then, that the friendly union of virtuous minds has nothing meritorious in it; that the intercourſe by which they ſhare

ſhare the joys, and divide the ſorrows of each other, is attended with no utility; and that the public has no concern in the advantages for the purſuit of knowledge and virtue, which friendſhip affords? Is it indeed true, that there is no merit in ſeeking the beſt intereſts of the ſociety with which we are connected, in encouraging and promoting public deſigns, in riſing up in defence of our country's juſt rights, and in endeavouring to enlarge and ſecure its eſſential privileges? Why then, the Chriſtian religion does not encourage the cultivation of theſe affections. If, on the contrary, it be acknowledged, that friendſhip is a diſcipline for the higher virtues; and that the love of our country tends, in its juſt conſequences, to univerſal benevolence; it will follow, that every precept to charity which we read, every example of it which we behold, tends to form the friend and the patriot.

WHAT noble views of moral duties does Chriſtianity afford, when it is thus conſidered! In this light it will be of admirable uſe to the Chriſtian preacher; and aſſiſt him to draw up ſuch diſcourſes on the duties of the Chriſtian life, as will command the attention, and direct the practice of thoſe to whom they are addreſſed. He will be careful, indeed, to lay down rules, and deliver precepts of morality with ſufficient preciſion and minuteneſs, to direct the judgment and conduct of his hearers; but he will be ſtill more concerned to form and cheriſh thoſe moral principles in the mind, which will make every man, in a great meaſure, his own inſtructer and guide.

A MIND charged with theſe ideas of morality, cannot fail of applying the truths of religion to their proper uſe, to ſupport and improve the virtue of thoſe who receive them. Here the preacher

preacher will avail himſelf of the doctrines which are expreſsly taught, or evidently referred to, in the ſacred Scriptures. From this moſt excellent book he will borrow the juſteſt deſcriptions of the divine perfections and government, ſo as to point it out to his hearers as their indiſpenſable duty, and their higheſt intereſt, to yield a ready and unreſerved obedience to all God's commandments. But a ſtill higher advantage will accrue from this ſtudy; it will enable him to give ſuch a repreſentation of the mercy of God, as may encourage all the wicked to repent of their ſins, and forſake them.

THERE is ſomething very ſtriking in the idea which the Scriptures give us of Jeſus Chriſt, as the founder and head of a kingdom, which is begun in this world, and conſiſts of all thoſe who govern themſelves by the laws of it, in whatever age, or in whatever country

country they may live. The ſubjects of it, it is true, have never yet been aſſembled, or appeared under one viſible head. They may ſome of them have lived together, and converſed with each other, without diſcovering that they belonged to the ſame ſociety; and may have acknowledged thoſe who had no right, and diſowned thoſe who had a right, to the privileges of this kingdom. Still, however, it is a pleaſing thought, that all the righteous, under all their different forms, and in all their various diſperſions, ſtand in the neareſt relation to each other, as the ſubjects of one prince, as governed by the ſame laws, and as deſigned for a nearer and more intimate union with each other in the future world.

For this kingdom, though at preſent in a ſituation where all things are liable to change, and ſubject to the infirmities of which the earth and all its inhabitants

bitants partake, ſhall hereafter appear with inconceivable dignity and ſplendour, and ſhall continue till every worthy member is received into it; and the purpoſes for which it was erected being fully anſwered, its great Head ſhall deliver it up to his Father, from whom he derived his authority, that God may be all in all.*

WHO will not acknowledge, that it gives a peculiar dignity to the rules of virtue and religion, to conſider them as the laws of this illuſtrious ſociety? It is called a kingdom of righteouſneſs; and it is with the utmoſt propriety, that it has this appellation. From this it derives its original; to this it owes its ſupport; and it will be compleated in the perfect righteouſneſs of all its members.

ANOTHER advantage of this repreſentation of Chriſtianity, is the aſſiſt-

* 1 Cor. xv. 24—28.

ance

ance it affords in forming or improving our ideas of God's moral government. The character of our Saviour riſes to an inconceivable height of dignity and importance, when we conſider the nature and the extent of his dominion. The whole race of mankind are his ſubjects; and all thoſe who refuſe to govern themſelves by his laws, as far as they are diſcovered to them, ſhall be excluded from his preſence, and have their everlaſting condition determined by his righteous ſentence; whilſt thoſe who have humbly deſired and endeavoured to obſerve the righteous laws which he has given, ſhall riſe to ſome ſhare of his glory and happineſs, and have their abode in thoſe regions, where righteouſneſs ſhall obtain an univerſal and everlaſting dominion. How contemptible do all the kingdoms of the earth appear, when compared with this glorious kingdom! The meaneſt ſubject of this great prince,

prince, in true excellence exceeds the greateſt potentate on earth. How great then muſt he himſelf be! And above all, how high muſt our ideas riſe of His univerſal providence, and of His uncontrolled authority, to whom the Head of this ſociety, when he has ſubdued all things to himſelf, ſhall finally ſubmit!

§. X.

IT might in all reaſon be expected, that a fair repreſentation of theſe truths and duties, in their connexion with each other, eſpecially if accompanied with a view of their preſent and future conſequences, would reach every heart, and be effectual not only to inſtruct men in their duty, but to perſuade them to the practice of it. This will doubtleſs be the caſe with thoſe who will give a proper attention to theſe intereſting ſubjects. But thoſe who ne-

glect to hear the word altogether, or will not employ the thought neceſſary to underſtand what is ſaid, and to impreſs it upon their minds, will, through mere careleſſneſs, or under the influence of worldly paſſions and cares, find it ineffectual to their beſt improvement.

This leads me to conſider, what the ſpeaker ſhould do to win the attention of his hearers. Are there any arts of pleaſing, by which he may inſinuate himſelf into their favour, and conciliate a proper regard to his opinions and reaſonings? It ſeems to have been the general opinion of mankind that there are. Hence, to pleaſe has been uſually conſidered as the third branch of oratory, and thought conducive to the inſtruction and perſuaſion, which ſhould be chiefly regarded by every public ſpeaker. It is not then to be ſought for its own ſake, but as ſubſervient to a higher purpoſe; and the deſire to pleaſe,

pleaſe, if it ſpring from vanity or ambition, is contemptible in proportion to the importance of the ſubjects on which the diſcourſe turns. On a frivolous ſubject, it will be more excuſable to addreſs the diſcourſe to the imaginations of the audience, and the ſpeaker will merit a milder cenſure, if childiſh ornaments are ſought, and even diſplayed with a fondneſs for admiration and applauſe. In every harangue, however, ſuch addreſſes to the fancy, as ſerve to call off the attention of thoſe who hear from the ſubject to the orator, muſt be condemned; and in the general, no ornaments can be agreeable to a perſon of ſound judgment, which are far-fetched, and eſpecially which are inconſiſtent with, or foreign to, its profeſſed deſign. This is fixed upon by an excellent critic, who appears to have been a friend to all the graces of ſpeaking and writing which could be admitted, as what conſtituted the

great difference between Demoſthenes and Cicero, and inclined him to give the preference to the Grecian orator. "Cicero," ſays he, "embelliſhes every "thing which he handles, &c. His "art is wonderful, but ſtill we diſcern "it. Whilſt he is concerned for the "ſafety of the republic, he does not "forget that he is an orator, nor does "he let others forget it. Demoſthenes "ſeems tranſported, and to have no-"thing in view but his country. He "does not ſtudy what is beautiful, but "naturally falls into it without re-"flecting. We cannot criticiſe him, "for he is maſter of our paſſions. We "conſider the thing which he ſays, "and not his words. We loſe ſight "of him, and think of Philip only, "who uſurps every thing. I am charm-"ed with theſe two orators, but I con-"feſs that Cicero's prodigious art, and "magnificent eloquence, charms me

"leſs

" leſs than the vehement ſimplicity of " Demoſthenes." *

NOTHING can be juſter or more ſolid than the reaſon aſſigned for the preference here given. But if it be expected on other ſubjects, that the ſpeaker keep out of ſight, and forbear every thing that has the appearance of a deſign to diſplay his own art; it is with yet higher reaſon, that we demand this modeſty in the ſacred orator, who ought to be entirely engroſſed with his ſubject, and to diſcover nothing, to mean nothing but the deſire of giving a juſt and plain repreſentation of it. This will preſerve him from the declamatory manner, in which ſome preachers appear ſo much to delight; and confine him to that noble ſimplicity, which is the only true ornament of moral and religious diſcourſes.

* SEE a *Letter from the Archbiſhop of Cambray to Mr. Fontenelle, Secretary to the French Academy*, p. 236, 237.

THE ſame obſervations will apply to the delivery, as to the ſtyle of ſermons. If the ſentiments, which they ought to convey, be deeply impreſſed on the preacher's own mind, they will almoſt ſuperſede the neceſſity of rules on this ſubject. Let him but keep clear of affectation, and conſider his own powers; let him allow himſelf in that animation of language and manner, which a ſenſe of the truth and importance of his doctrine will give; and he can hardly fail of riſing above mediocrity, and will probably have every excellence of which his abilities admit.

IT is readily acknowledged to be a deſirable thing, that a good diſcourſe be well delivered; and if nothing more eſſential be ſacrificed to it, the care which ſome have taken to recommend their public ſervices by a juſt pronunciation, and by an animated and graceful addreſs, deſerves great commendation;

tion; and the ſucceſs, with which it has been attended, will encourage every young preacher to ſeek this accompliſhment. It muſt, however, be owned, that too much ſtreſs has ſometimes been laid upon it; and that his powers of ſpeaking have, in ſome caſes, procured the preacher a degree of applauſe which his compoſitions by no means merited. This unhappy conſequence too has in ſome inſtances been ſeen—that he has himſelf attended to them too much, and conſidered rather how than what he ſhould preach; and hence, from a conſciouſneſs of his excellencies in this art, and ſecure of pleaſing by them, has neglected thoſe ſtudies which are neceſſary to give his compoſitions their true value, and to ſecure the happy effects which they are intended to produce.

My meaning briefly is, that this, with every other pleaſing, ornamental art, be employed to ſubſerve the views

and purpoſes of real merit; but that it never uſurp its place, or ſet off a diſcourſe which wants the other and higher excellencies.

THE ſame rules ſhould be obſerved in the devotional compoſitions, as in thoſe which have been already mentioned. Such as are called upon to draw up prayers for their own uſe, or for that of others, ought to have a clear view of the truths on which they are founded, and a lively perception of the ſentiments which they intend to expreſs; and then ſuch words will naturally follow, as the ſeveral parts of the ſervice require. A juſt ſenſe of the Divine character, and a ſerious recollection of the mercies of God, will eaſily direct to the proper language of praiſe and thankſgiving: the conſciouſneſs of guilt will teach us how to confeſs our ſins, and in what words to deprecate the juſtice, and implore the mercy

mercy of Heaven; and the perſuaſion of man's ignorance and weakneſs, and God's all-ſufficiency, as it ſhews the propriety of prayer, will ſupply the beſt directions as to the manner in which it ſhould be performed. He who is deſtitute of theſe ſentiments, can hardly be expected to ſucceed himſelf in compoſitions of this ſort, or to be a good judge of thoſe of others; and he whoſe own mind is really impreſſed with them, with a tolerable acquaintance with language, and ſkill in compoſition, can hardly miſcarry.

It is not my intention to enter into the queſtions of the propriety and uſe of ſtated forms of prayer; or of reciting rather than reading thoſe which are drawn up from time to time, for general or particular occaſions. Each method has its advantages and diſadvantages; the ends of devotion may be attained under any of them: theſe are among

among the queſtions, which every man may ſafely be left to anſwer, according to his particular taſte and genius; and which all Chriſtian ſocieties ſhould determine for themſelves, as their wiſdom and judgment ſhall enable them.

It ſhould, however, be ſtrongly inculcated on the preacher, who is to conduct the devotions of his fellow-worſhippers, as well as impart inſtructions to them, that he cannot be too careful to obſerve the greateſt ſimplicity of expreſſion and delivery in every part of this ſervice. The ſtyle of devotional compoſitions ſhould be more particularly diſtinguiſhed by its perſpicuity and ſimplicity. If any ſentiment be ſo expreſſed, as to require any thing additional to explain, to guard, to confine, or enlarge it, it is ſo far improper in an addreſs to the great Being, who is preſent with all his creatures, ſo as to know all their thoughts and purpoſes.

But

But if it be cenſured as an impropriety to depart from this noble ſimplicity of expreſſion in devotional compoſition, how unbecoming is it in him who leads the devotions of others, to be ſtudious about what may be moſt pleaſing to thoſe who ſhall join in them! If he who appears to pray, or profeſſes to ſpeak to God, diſcover a fondneſs for the beauties of language, or the graces of delivery; if he be more deſirous to ſet himſelf off to advantage, than to give a natural, unaffected expreſſion to the devout ſentiments, with which his heart is impreſſed; it may be preſumed that he does not pray himſelf at all, nor can it be expected that he ſhould aſſiſt the devotions of other worſhippers. But I think it unneceſſary to ſay any thing further on this head, being fully of opinion, that whoever has attentively conſidered the doctrines of religion, and the temper of mind to which they lead, and reflected at all on the manner

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in which it ſhould be expreſſed in an addreſs to God, will generally ſucceed in this part of his office; whether he draw up forms beforehand, or clothe the thoughts, which he has carefully digeſted, in ſuch words as offer themſelves at the time; whether he read or recite his prayers.

§. XI.

THE ſame great objects which direct and animate the public diſcourſes of the Chriſtian miniſter, will naturally carry him through the other duties of his office with a right ſpirit. His whole behaviour to his people in the houſe of prayer, and in all other places, in his common viſits, in his attendance on the ſick, and in thoſe ſervices, which peculiarly reſpect the riſing generation, will be directed by the ſame principles, and conducted to the ſame purpoſe. But theſe are particulars, which have been

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ſo frequently diſcuſſed already, that however intimate their connexion may be with the other parts of this diſcourſe, I ſhall be excuſed, if I content myſelf with this general mention of them.*

WHOEVER will reflect for a moment on the end of the miniſterial office, will acknowledge, that the execution of it ought to engage all the attention which we can beſtow. Every purſuit in life, ſhould be conducted with a zeal proportioned to its importance. To be zealous about trifles, is a proof of a little mind: to be zealous in a bad cauſe, argues only a higher degree of wickedneſs: on the ſame principle, he cannot reaſonably expect to eſcape cenſure, who enters on a good cauſe with coolneſs and indifference. But though the preacher has the higheſt incentives to zeal, he, above all

* SOME of my readers will perhaps recollect, that my thoughts on moſt of theſe ſubjects are already before the public.

others,

others, will be expected to temper it with a ſerious, humble ſpirit; and to regulate it by the moſt extenſive charity for all that difference of opinion, which has ever prevailed in the world. Is it neceſſary to add (thoſe who have been attentive to the ſpirit of this diſcourſe will hardly need the hint) that the zeal for which I contend, has for its object not the peculiarities of a party, but thoſe great things, which in profeſſion at leaſt are principal in every party? As far, however, as any one is of opinion, that the particular modes which he adopts, are conducive to what is of chief importance in religion, he may be allowed to plead earneſtly for them; and whilſt no infringement is made on Chriſtian candour, to be zealouſly affected towards them.*

* For the fuller diſcuſſion of this ſubject, I refer to the preceding Diſcourſe.

THIS zeal to diſcharge his duty, will naturally induce the preacher to inquire, what means will be moſt effectual to ſecure ſucceſs.

FIRST, Every conſiderate perſon will acknowledge, that it is very neceſſary to the ſucceſs of a Chriſtian miniſter, that he be himſelf a ſincere, exemplary Chriſtian. If any one indeed can ſtand up, and inculcate upon others, what he is perſuaded in his own mind is not true, he diſcovers ſo much guilt and meanneſs, that I ſhould not hope for the leaſt ſucceſs from any thing which I could ſay for his conviction and amendment. It is a character ſo very deteſtable, and at the ſame time ſo contemptible, that I would flatter myſelf, the number of thoſe who merit it, is but inconſiderable. They are not, however, the miniſters whom I have in my eye in the preſent advice. It is at leaſt ſuppoſable, that he who does not

not obſerve the rules which the Goſpel preſcribes, may yet believe its divine original, and ſincerely recommend it to the attention of the world. It is through infirmity alone, and in oppoſition to his better principles, that he does the things which he condemns, and violates the laws which he profeſſes to obſerve. But, how neceſſary is it, that a teacher of religion ſhould guard againſt this inconſiſtency! How will he anſwer the queſtions which are with ſuch plain, ſtriking eloquence propoſed by the apoſtle? "Thou there-
"fore who teacheſt another, teacheſt
"thou not thyſelf? Thou who makeſt
"thy boaſt of the law, through
"breaking the law diſhonoureſt thou
"God?"

NONE, however, but ſuch as are loſt to all ſenſe of propriety and decency, can allow themſelves in the violation of thoſe rules, which they preſcribe to others;

others; but it is generally expected, that thoſe who teach in the Chriſtian church ſhould not only be decent, but exemplary in their conduct, and fix to themſelves a higher ſtandard of morals than other Chriſtians. They are chargeable with great inconſiſtency, it is true, who are themſelves immoral, and yet ſevere in their cenſures on the faults, and even on the infirmities of their miniſters: they do not conſider, I ſuppoſe, that, for the time at leaſt, they aſſume the character which requires ſuch purity of manners. But I excuſe their miſtake; I freely forgive their ſeverity; and I wiſh all the miniſters of religion to remember, that they muſt count upon ſuch treatment; and that it behoves them, therefore, to be particularly circumſpect in their behaviour, and to order their whole converſation ſo, as to reflect the higheſt honour on their profeſſion. Thus will they ſtop the mouths of thoſe who are ill-affected

to them; and, which is of higher importance, conciliate the eſteem of good men, and moſt probably ſecure the ends of their miniſtry.

It is ſo indiſpenſable in the miniſterial character, that he who undertakes it, ſhould himſelf afford an example of the rules which he enjoins; that, unleſs this be his fixed reſolution, it were better he ſhould turn his thoughts to ſome other employment, than defeat the purpoſes of his miniſtrations by an unſuitable conduct.

Secondly, It is beſides of great importance, that the preacher be a man of extenſive knowledge, and good learning. In order to ſpeak or write well on any ſubject, it is deſirable to have a general knowledge at leaſt of every one. This is a very neceſſary qualification for ſuch as propoſe to diſcourſe on moral and religious ſubjects. They

They have frequent occaſion to refer to other arts and ſciences, in order to illuſtrate their doctrine, and to render it more intelligible, or at leaſt more pleaſing; if therefore they are ignorant on theſe heads, they muſt either omit ſuch references altogether, or run the hazard of expoſing themſelves, by their miſtakes, to the cenſure of their more intelligent hearers.

On many ſubjects it is not eaſy to acquire knowledge, without ſome tolerable ſhare of learning. It is deſirable, therefore, that the preacher ſhould ſtudy books as well as men; thoſe more eſpecially written on the duties, which he is called upon to explain and enforce. Thus will he improve his own ideas, by comparing them with thoſe of others; or avoid the errors into which they appear to have fallen.

On the revival of letters, after a long reign of ignorance and barbariſm, the chief object of learned men was to recover the works of the ancient Latin, and afterwards of the Greek authors, and to gain an accurate knowledge of their contents; and not only to read, but imitate them on the ſame or ſimilar ſubjects. Accordingly, to write correct and elegant Latin and Greek in proſe or verſe, was the whole to which the ambition of the greater part of ſcholars aſpired. This, in proceſs of time, fell into diſgrace, under the appellation of the mere ſtudy of words. The attention of ſcholars was turned from hence to things; and the learned languages, as they are called, began to be neglected. Now it muſt be acknowledged, that an acquaintance with words alone, however accurate and extenſive, is indeed a poor attainment: but whatever knowledge a man may have, unleſs he

he be a maſter of language, he cannot impart it to others; nor can he enrich his mind with the ſentiments of writers in ancient or foreign languages, if he be a ſtranger to the words with which they are clothed. The knowledge of the tongues in which the Holy Scriptures are written, is of eſſential importance. Thoſe who wiſh to have a juſt acquaintance with the contents of theſe books, will be unwilling to truſt to any tranſlation; and it will bring a great reflection on the Chriſtian preacher not to be able to conſult the original.

BUT there is an obvious difference between paying a proper attention to this branch of learning, and making it the ſole employment of our thoughts. I would wiſh, indeed, that the works of the ancients ſhould not be laid aſide, till it be more evident, than it has yet been made, that they are not worth

reading;* but not that they ſhould fill up thoſe hours, which may be devoted to higher and more intereſting ſpeculations. It will certainly conduce to the reputation and the ſucceſs of the Chriſtian preacher, to have a general acquaintance with all the fields of human literature.

THERE was a time, when there was little learning or knowledge, except amongſt the miniſters of religion; and ſuch of them as were ignorant, were ſeldom known to be ſo, but to the more learned of their own order. The ſtate of things in the preſent age is widely different; ſo much ſo, that there never was perhaps any period, in which ignorance would be more certainly detected, or more infallibly bring

* IT has been humorouſly ſaid, "Ariſtotle is not "ſo great a fool, as thoſe, who have never read his "works, take him to be."

contempt

contempt on thoſe who ſhould appear to merit the imputation.

WHATEVER reflections may have been caſt on the preachers in diſſenting churches, as deficient in point of learning, there ſeems to have been no juſt foundation for them. I will venture to ſay, that they have not in any age been generally unacquainted with ſuch branches of ſcience, as then engaged the attention of the public. I congratulate my cotemporaries on the reputation which the preſent race of miniſters ſupport in this particular; and conſider it as a pleaſing circumſtance, that many of thoſe who are now entering on the miniſtry amongſt us, afford the proſpect of their keeping up this character.

I MEAN not the leaſt reflection on the preſent ſtate of learning amongſt the miniſters of the eſtabliſhment; or to make a compariſon between them and

the diſſenting brethren in this, or in any other inſtance. I ſhall only add, that the latter, if inferior to the eſtabliſhed clergy in ſome branches, are by no means ſo in others. Their ſeminaries of learning labour under many diſadvantages, which it is not my preſent deſign to enumerate; ſeveral of them, however, are conducted in a manner favourable to the intereſts of ſound learning, and likely to tranſmit a taſte for ſcience and literature to ſucceeding ages.

SHOULD the knowledge of this fact make its way into our univerſities, or other public ſchools, ſo as to excite a ſpirit of emulation in them; it will, I hope, raiſe only the friendly contention of gaining thoſe literary accompliſhments in a yet higher degree, which may ſubſerve the intereſts of real Chriſtianity. Would to God, it might lead to ſuch an union amongſt all

all the ſects, into which the Chriſtian world is divided, that, forgetting all the cauſes of an unfriendly alienation which have hitherto ſubſiſted, they might combine their united forces in the cauſe of learning, virtue, and true religion!

LASTLY, I would wiſh the Chriſtian preacher the advantage which an eaſy addreſs, and poliſhed manners will give him. The foundation of this accompliſhment muſt be in the mind itſelf, which, in order to take this external poliſh, muſt poſſeſs a native and an improved benevolence. Nothing ſhort of this can "gentle the condition." If this natural politeneſs be wanting, all the appearances of it, which may be aſſumed, deſerve no higher appellation than that of a hollow complaiſance, or mean ſervility, to which the roughest manners of unaffected ſincerity are infinitely preferable. Where it has a real exiſtence,

exiſtence, ſome attention however may ſtill be neceſſary, to expreſs it in the moſt eaſy and unaffected manner. The rules for this engaging behaviour I ſhall not take upon me to recite; it is perhaps impoſſible for the moſt accompliſhed gentleman to give a compleat detail; but the deſire to pleaſe, and the willingneſs to be pleaſed, juſt referred to, will ſupply the place of the far greater part of them.

THESE manners are peculiarly neceſſary for thoſe, who have frequent calls to converſe with people in the higher ſtations of life. They will be able to enter into ſuch company with leſs pain to themſelves, and to bear a part in the converſation with more honour to their characters. A good miniſter will preſerve the dignity of virtue in every ſituation; but he will at the ſame time be ſolicitous to pay thoſe attentions to mankind, which will give the moſt favourable

vourable idea of his profeſſion, and promote his ſucceſs in diſcharging its offices. It will conduce very much to this, to be able to ſupport the character of the gentleman, as well as that of the Chriſtian.

IF, moreover, there be at any time a proper call to introduce any moral or religious ſubject into common converſation, he will be able to acquit himſelf well on the occaſion; and even to proceed to the painful, difficult buſineſs of admonition and reproof, when neceſſary, with the faireſt proſpect of ſucceſs.

THUS, my reverend brethren, have I pointed out to you the great object on which your eyes ſhould always be fixed in your public ſervices, and in every other ſituation into which you may be brought—to aſſiſt your fellow-Chriſtians in attaining that temper, and forming

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forming that character, which will, through the bleſſing of God, procure them every deſirable enjoyment in the preſent world, and infallibly ſecure their future, and everlaſting happineſs.

THERE cannot be a more intereſting inquiry than that which has now been made into the moſt probable means of ſucceſs in this employment. Some things, which have been ſaid, you will think of greater importance, others of leſs: but you will, I am perſuaded, afford them all a ſerious conſideration. It will be acknowledged of ſome advantage, to acquire ſuch a behaviour as may be generally pleaſing; it is ſtill more neceſſary to keep up a conſtant attention to thoſe ſtudies, which will improve your underſtanding, and procure you the reputation of knowledge and learning; but what is of higheſt conſequence, is, to preſerve that purity of

of manners, which the miniſterial office requires, and to make your example as amiable and uſeful as poſſible to all with whom you converſe.

I MUST not conclude without acknowledging, that I have the higheſt regard for the temper and characters of my Chriſtian brethren, to whom I have addreſſed theſe advices. The preacher himſelf needs, at leaſt, as much as any who now ſit to hear, the word of exhortation; and if he does not deceive himſelf, he would be happy to have his ideas on this ſubject improved by the experience of thoſe who have ſo many calls to conſider it, and his endeavours quickened by their example. He ſubmits what has been ſaid to the candid judgment of all whom it may concern; wiſhing in particular, that the younger brethren may enter into the office with ſuch views of its deſign,

and

and ſuch reſolutions to preſerve a conſtant attention to them, as may enſure them all deſirable ſucceſs, and give them everlaſting cauſe for rejoicing.

THE END.

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